

ESSAYS, DIALOGUES, AND THOUGHTS
BY
GIACOMO LEOPARDI

ESSAYS, DIALOGUES AND THOUGHTS

(*OPERETTE MORALI AND PENSIERI*)

OF

GIACOMO LEOPARDI

TRANSLATED BY

JAMES THOMSON ('B.V.')

Author of The City of Dreadful Night, etc.

EDITED BY

BERTRAM DOBELL

*Author of Sidelights on Charles Lamb, Rosemary
and Pansies, etc.*



LONDON

GEORGE ROUTLEDGE & SONS, LIMITED

NEW YORK: E. R. DUTTON & CO.

TO
JOHN W. BARRS

**ONE OF JAMES THOMSON'S BEST AND
MOST DEVOTED FRIENDS
THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED BY
THE EDITOR**

CONTENTS

[In the following table those pieces which were printed during Thomson's lifetime are distinguished by a *. All the rest are now printed for the first time. Of the "Memoir of Leopardi" the greater portion was published in the *National Reformer*, but about a third of it is now first printed.]

	PAGE
EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION	ix
*MEMOIR OF LEOPARDI	1
PARALLEL BETWEEN PASCAL AND LEOPARDI	91
STORY OF THE HUMAN RACE	97
DIALOGUE BETWEEN HERCULES AND ATLAS	111
DIALOGUE OF FASHION AND DEATH	115
PRIZES PROPOSED BY THE ACADEMY OF SILLOGRAPHS	120
DIALOGUE BETWEEN A SPRITE AND A GNOME	124
DIALOGUE BETWEEN MALAMBRUNO AND FANFANELLO	128
*DIALOGUE BETWEEN NATURE AND A SOUL	131
DIALOGUE BETWEEN THE EARTH AND THE MOON	135
THE WAGER OF PROMETHEUS	149
*DIALOGUE BETWEEN A NATURAL PHILOSOPHER AND A METAPHYSICIAN	151
DIALOGUE BETWEEN TASSO AND HIS FAMILIAR SPIRIT	157
DIALOGUE BETWEEN NATURE AND AN ICELANDER	165
ROMAN'S DISCOURSE ON GLORY	172
*DIALOGUE BETWEEN ROYCE AND HIS MUMMIES	204
MEMORABLE SAYINGS OF FELIPPO OTTONIARI	210

	PAGE
*DIALOGUE OF COLUMBUS AND GUTIERREZ . . .	235
*IN PRAISE OF BLINDNESS . . .	240
THE CANTICLE OF THE WILD COCK . . .	247
*DIALOGUE OF TIMANDER AND ELEANOR . . .	252
*COPERNICUS . . .	262
*DIALOGUE BETWEEN A VENDOR OF ALMANACS AND A PASSER-BY . . .	273
*DIALOGUE BETWEEN PLOTINUS AND PORPHYRY . . .	276
*DIALOGUE BETWEEN TRISTAN AND A FRIEND . . .	291
*COMPARISON OF THE LAST WORDS OF BRUTUS AND THEOPHRASTUS . . .	301
APOCRYPHAL FRAGMENT OF STRATO OF LAMPRACUS	310
PREFACE TO TRANSLATION OF THE DISCOURSES OF ISOCHRATES . . .	315
*EXTRACT FROM A REVIEW OF LONG'S TRANSLATION OF THE "DISCOURSES OF EPICTETUS" . . .	320
THOUGHTS . . .	325

INTRODUCTION

I HAVE much pleasure in giving to the public yet another volume of the writings of the author of *The City of Dreadful Night*. It is at least a proof of the increasing estimation in which his genius is now held that a work of his should be selected to form part of a popular series such as the present. During Thomson's lifetime, and for some time afterwards, it seemed as if it was impossible that there could ever be any general recognition of his genius. Happily that period of obscurity is over, and he is now seen in his true light as one of the most significant and representative poets of the nineteenth century.

It is easy to understand by what motives Thomson was led to undertake the translation of the prose works of the greatest Italian writer of the last century. (Let it be noted in passing that he was the first Englishman * to attempt the task.) As I shall have occasion to show later on, there are few writers between whom a more complete affinity existed than between the great

of Thomson as an Englishman I should be loath to arouse the wrath of the countrymen of Burns were it not for the fact that they have not, so the slightest disposition to claim the author of *Dreadful Night* as one of their national poets. Though he did not display the more distinctive qualities, he was nevertheless a true Scot in heart and brain. Perhaps his countrymen will find this out some day. Meantime, as Thomson's associations and interests were chiefly English, and there is little in his writings which owes its inspiration to his nationality, Englishmen may be pardoned for speaking of him as one of themselves.

Italian poet of pessimism and the great—yes, the great—English one. As Thomson has shown, there were many points of resemblance between the believing Pascal and the unbelieving Leopardi; but I cannot help thinking that the resemblances between Leopardi and Thomson himself were even more remarkable.

It will be best, perhaps, at this point to tell the reader in what way the present volume has come into existence. What first led Thomson to study the Italian language we do not know; but we do know that he learnt that, as he learnt German and perhaps French, not as a part of his school lessons, but for his own pleasure and improvement. His method of learning Italian, he told a friend, was to take an opera libretto and study each word in it down to its root. In this way he gained a competent knowledge of it, though it may be that he missed something of its finer spirit owing to his want of familiarity with it as a spoken language. We do not know when he first became acquainted with the writings of Leopardi, though it is likely enough that a desire to study them was one of the reasons which led him to acquire the language. Mr. Gladstone's essay on the life and writings of Leopardi had been published in the *Quarterly Review* in 1850; and I feel pretty sure that it was from this article that Thomson, like so many other Englishmen, gained his first knowledge of the famous Italian*. In 1850, however, Thomson was not yet out of his boyhood, and therefore it is probable that it was not till some years later—perhaps in 1864 or thereabouts—that he first began to study the writings of Leopardi. In November, 1867, the first of Thomson's translations from him (*Copernicus*) appeared in Charles Bradlaugh's paper; *The National Reformer*. Various other translations appeared in the same year, and in the course of 1868; while in 1869-70 the greater part of the Memoir of Leopardi, which forms a portion of the contents of

* A good and appreciative notice of Leopardi had previously appeared in *Fraser's Magazine* for 1848. This is the earliest notice of him that I can trace in any English book or periodical.

the present volume, was also published in the same periodical. No more of his work upon Leopardi appeared during Thomson's lifetime; but during the years 1867-77 he was engaged at intervals in the task of rendering into English all the prose writings of Leopardi which are of general interest. As he derived no profit (I mean, of course, no pecuniary profit) from these labours, it is evident that his chief motives for undertaking them were the sympathy which he felt for one whose genius was so nearly akin to his own, and his desire to make himself intimately acquainted with the philosophy and spirit of the great Italian author. From 1877 until his death the vicissitudes of Thomson's life prevented him from completing his work upon Leopardi. He did, indeed, during the last months of his existence make some efforts to resume his task; but his unfortunate malady had then rendered him incapable of the necessary application, and he did little or nothing towards carrying his intention into effect. Thus it has happened that the translations (excepting those which appeared in *The National Reformer*), in spite of the praises bestowed upon them by Dr. Garnett and other competent judges, have remained unpublished until the present time. Nevertheless, steps towards their publication would have been taken much earlier had there been a sufficient degree of encouragement for the enterprise; but it has proved very difficult to persuade the public that any writings of Thomson's, save *The City of Dreadful Night*, are worth reading or purchasing. And I must confess that they might still have remained unpublished for some time to come had not the publishers, becoming aware of their existence, offered to include them in the present series. As no project which promised to extend the fame and appreciation of 'B. V.' could fail to commend itself to me, I was very willing to accept their proposal. If I hesitated it was only because I had some doubts as to my own qualifications for the office of editor; but as I knew of no one who would have been willing to undertake the necessary labour of revision I determined to attempt the task. It

proved, I am bound to say, a much more difficult one than I had anticipated. After a careful examination of the manuscripts I could come to no other conclusion than that they required to be largely, if not entirely, rewritten. The translations indeed rendered the sense of their originals very faithfully; but they were in most cases only rough drafts (so termed by Thomson himself) which required much shaping and polishing to fit them for publication. This was not a task which I would have undertaken if I could have avoided it, but it was necessary either to do it or to abandon the idea of publishing the book. Whether my decision to go on with the work was a wise or an unwise one I must leave others to judge, but I could not rest satisfied without attempting to fulfil what seemed to be a duty imposed upon me. I did not indeed consider myself at liberty to deal as freely with the printed as with the unprinted matter, and therefore I have made but few and slight alterations in the former*. But with regard to the latter, though I have adhered as closely as possible to Thomson's interpretations of the spirit and sense of his author, I have dealt very freely indeed with the form of his renderings. I make this statement, not from a desire to gain credit for my work, but because I wish to take my due share of responsibility for whatever errors or shortcomings the critic may detect in the book.

Something should be said here as to the Memoir of Leopardi which forms part of the contents of this book. It was written, as I have explained, in 1869-70, and gives a fairly complete summary of the information which was then available on the subject. I do not believe that there are any misstatements of fact in it; but since it was written much additional information has come to light, which supplements and completes our knowledge of the life of the poet, and of the circumstances which exercised so evil an influence over him. I cannot attempt here to supply the deficiencies

* See the table of contents, in which I have pointed out which pieces were published in Thomson's lifetime, and which now first appear in print.

of the Memoir ; but one or two points may be briefly glanced at. Thomson was ignorant of the large part which Leopardi's mother played in embittering and increasing the unhappiness which her son was doomed to suffer. She was not indeed a bad woman, but rather in some ways a woman of superior character and of much strength of will. But she had devoted her life to one great purpose, namely, the restoration of the much-impaired fortunes of the Leopardis. This purpose she pursued with relentless energy, and at the cost of sacrificing to it all the finer feelings of her nature—if indeed these were not always absent in her. Her want of natural affection, not only for her most gifted son, but for the rest of her children, made the family home a prison—the word is hardly too strong—from which the strongest desire of its inmates was to escape. It is not often that men of genius suffer from a want of sympathy and affection in their mothers ; but it is hardly too much to say that in Leopardi's case his mother's influence, next to that of the evil destiny which bestowed upon him the best it could give only to mock him by coupling with it the worst of all evils, was the one which, if it did not originally create his unhappiness, at least rendered it impossible for him to escape from it. Probably she was not conscious of the harm which she was doing him, and certainly she had no active ill-will towards him ; but to a nature like his, which craved for love and sympathy above all else, the denial of affection was a worse fault even than actual ill-treatment would have been. What was plain to everyone else she could not see ; having no love in her heart she could give him none ; with no intelligence, save such as sufficed for the ordinary affairs of life, she could not appreciate his genius—nay rather she looked upon it as something evil and unholy ; and perhaps his deformity and sufferings, which should have given him an additional claim upon her affection, may rather have hardened her heart towards him. Of all inexplicable mysteries in a world of mysteries there is no greater marvel than that such a mother should have had such a son.

That Leopardi's father also was out of sympathy with his son the reader will gather from the Memoir, and therefore there is no need for me to dwell here upon the fact. In the case of both parents it is of course useless to lament that they were what they were; their faults or deficiencies of character were owing rather to the circumstances of their time, and the priestly influences under which they had grown up, than to any wilfully cultivated ill qualities in themselves. Perhaps it was a misfortune for them that so illustrious a son should have been born to them, for their faults would otherwise have been buried in that merciful oblivion which so surely conceals the faults of the undistinguished many.

There was another source of Leopardi's unhappiness which is only slightly noticed in Thomson's Memoir. He had a heart which was passionately alive to the fascinations of beauty and intellect in the female sex—as what real poet has not?—and longed ardently for feminine love and sympathy. But with his sickly aspect and a figure which was at least insignificant, if not actually deformed, and nothing save his genius—seldom a recommendation to women—to inspire affection in them, he was foredoomed to suffer from the pangs of despised love and the longings of hopeless desire. Whether his sufferings from this cause were greater or less than those from other sources, it is hardly possible to judge; but certainly it was this which put the crown upon all his other misfortunes. 'Give me love, love, love!' he cries in one of his letters to his brother Carlo; but the fate which had decreed that because it had given him genius he should be deprived of every other good gift, denied him even this.

Much has been written about the life and works of Leopardi; if not in English, at any rate in Italian, French, and German. Of Thomson too a good deal has been written; but of both much remains to be said, which it is not possible as yet to say, and which perhaps it may not be possible to say until fifty or a hundred years have elapsed. But in whatever estima-

tion the two poets may then be held, it is at least certain that no future historian of literature can leave them unmentioned, or fail to take account of their influence upon the thought and poetry, not perhaps of their own time, but at least upon that of following generations. And, dangerous as it proverbially is to prophesy, I will hazard the opinion that Thomson will soon occupy a not less exalted place in English literature than Leopardi now holds in Italian. This, I know, is an opinion in which few will agree with me; yet as fewer still—so few indeed that they might have been counted upon the fingers of one hand—agreed with me when I first came to the conclusion that Thomson was to be counted among the leading English poets of the last century, I do not altogether despair of seeing the world come round to my opinion on this point also.

This is not the place in which any adequate estimate can be attempted either of Leopardi or of his translator. All I can do here is to make a few remarks which may prove helpful or suggestive to the reader. And perhaps I cannot cast these remarks in a better form than that which Thomson employs in making a comparison between Pascal and Leopardi. As I have already said, the resemblances between the lives and characters of Leopardi and his translator were at least as remarkable as those between Pascal and Leopardi. There were of course differences as well as resemblances; but differences are no less instructive than resemblances, as Plutarch, in the comparisons which he makes between his various heroes, has shown.

The chief causes of Leopardi's unhappiness were these: his health throughout his life was very bad; he lived during the greater part of his career in a small country town which he detested; his relations with his parents were very unhappy; he was unfortunate in love; and he suffered, if not from the worst ills of poverty, at least from all those which compel a man to live, not as he would, but as others will, or else under quite intolerable conditions. Owing to these various causes, any one of which would have been sufficient to

make happiness impossible for so sensitive a temperament as his, his great powers were to a large extent rendered useless, and his life was a long-drawn-out and pitiful tragedy. How could he help, under such conditions, coming to the conclusion that existence is in itself a curse, and that all men are necessarily unhappy? Of course it may and will be urged that he was not justified in drawing such a conclusion merely from his own experience; all I am now concerned to argue is that since he felt and knew himself to be utterly unhappy, it was a pardonable error, if error it was, to conclude that all other mortals are also unhappy.

The bad health of Leopardi must certainly be reckoned as the greatest and most irreparable of his misfortunes. It was indeed the one evil which, if it was not the parent of all the rest, at least intensified them and gave them a double power to wound and ravage his spirit. The worst effects of sickness are not physical, but moral: it is not the breaking down of the bodily powers, but the sapping of the mental energies, the paralysis of the will, and the suspension or destruction of the power of sane or vigorous thought which it causes, that are its most mournful consequences. It is, I think, impossible to deny that Leopardi's bad health had an evil influence on his mind; or that the deep and hopeless melancholy which characterises his writings was not in a great measure due to his physical sufferings. The marvel is that he was able, under such unhappy conditions, to produce works of such profundity of thought, such beauty of expression, and of such deep insight into human nature.

Thomson, unlike Leopardi, was blessed with a strong and vigorous constitution, which, but for one fatal flaw, would have enabled him to reach a fairly advanced age. In his youth and early manhood indeed he may be said to have possessed in an uncommon degree that soundness of body which is so great an aid to mental soundness, even if it is not an indispensable condition of it. But, as I have said, there was one unsound element in his constitution, which, ever gaining more and more power over him, poisoned the springs of his

life and genius, and after holding him for years a slave to its influence, at last utterly ruined and destroyed him. This was his inherited tendency to alcoholic excess—that failing which seems to assail in a peculiar degree the literary temperament, and which has claimed among its victims so many men of brilliant genius. I will not say that this failing of Thomson's was productive of so many evils (except indeed towards the end of his career) as Leopardi's constant ill-health; yet it is certain that it marred and blighted his life in a manner not much less calamitous. Here perhaps the reader may say or think that Thomson's malady differed from that of Leopardi in that it was one which he might, had he chosen, have controlled or cured. But that I am persuaded was not the case. Thomson was no more a willing victim to the intemperance which destroyed him than Leopardi was to the many maladies from which he suffered. The craving for alcohol has its origin, no less than fever or consumption, in physiological causes, and is no less a disease than they are. It may be allowed that it is a disease which, under favourable conditions, can be cured; and if the conditions in Thomson's case had been favourable, it is likely enough that he would have triumphed over it. But it was not to be so; and he, like Leopardi and Pascal, was to prove an example of the carelessness of nature in failing to provide a splendid intellect with a sound and serviceable physical organisation.

Coming to two of those other causes of Leopardi's unhappiness which I have enumerated—namely, his unfortunate relations with his parents and his aversion for his native place—we shall find little or nothing in Thomson's career to parallel them. The latter indeed was left an orphan at a very early age, while Leopardi's parents both outlived him. And though an orphanage is at best a poor substitute for a home, the English poet had but little reason to complain of his early surroundings. His vocation as an army schoolmaster gave him the opportunity in the course of his duties of travelling about a good deal, so that he beheld many of the most picturesque parts of the British Islands;

while, later in life, he saw something of Spain and America. And though his official duties were certainly irksome to him, they were probab^ly, less so than any other kind of employment open to him would have been. There was, however, one point in which the early career of Thomson resembled that of Leopardi. Both of them belonged to that class of poet-scholars, of whom, though it may not be correct to say that they are more interested in literature than in life, it may at least be asserted that they are not less interested in the one than the other. And therefore to such men the society of scholars and men of letters of like tastes to their own is little less than a necessity of their existence. But from such intercourse Leopardi, shut up in Recanati, and Thomson, in consequence of his obscure position in life, were equally debarred. The result in both cases was unfortunate. It is good for no one to be shut up, as it were, within himself, so that his mind, instead of gaining breadth and freshness by contact and collision with other intellects, contracts itself within a limited circle, wherein it may indeed gain force and concentration, but can hardly fail to lose in some degree the power of seeing things in the light of reason, rather than in that of imagination. Yet on the other hand it was probably this very solitariness and sedulous cultivation of their inner lives that developed and gave intensity to the genius of the two poets, which might otherwise have been wasted upon material unfitted for their powers.

The parallel between Leopardi and Thomson in the other causes which I have mentioned as contributing to the unhappiness of the former was almost perfect. Both were unfortunate in love, and both suffered from chronic poverty. Upon these points much might be said; but I do not propose to dwell upon them here. The story of Thomson's love for the young girl, whose untimely death had such a disastrous influence upon his career, may be read in many passages of his poems, and in his greatest prose work, *A Lady of Sorrow*. It may also be read in Mr. Salt's sympathetic life of

the poet. There is no detailed account in English of Leopardi's disappointments in love*; but, as I have already remarked, there is ample evidence that his spirit, craving above all else for love and sympathy, suffered intensely from the want of them. A comparison of the poems of the two authors will show conclusively what an essential likeness there was in their temperaments in this respect. It is hardly too much to say that if they had been as fortunate as they were unfortunate in love, their whole lives, as well as the character of their writings, might have been altogether different.

Though neither the Italian nor the English poet suffered from actual privation†, yet both endured, short of it, the worst evils of poverty. Neither of them ever possessed any means which were more than sufficient to provide—and that on the most limited scale—for their daily wants; and consequently both suffered from the mortifications and chafings of the spirit which are the constant attendants on penury. They could not, or would not, produce the popular wares from which alone it is possible to gain any considerable reward in literature. Their writings appealed only to the most limited class of readers; and in Thomson's case, until the very close of his life, his work only came before a small section even of this limited class.

An identity of outward circumstances in the lives of two persons will have little influence on their characters or destiny, unless there is an equal correspondence in their temperaments. It is what a man is in himself,

* See, however, an article in the *New Quarterly Magazine*, vol. xii., entitled 'The Loves of Leopardi,' by Mr. Charles Edwardes.

† Perhaps this statement needs some qualification in the case of Thomson. During the last few months of his life he was indeed sometimes in actual want; but this, it must be sorrowfully confessed, was owing rather to his excesses in drink than to any other cause. In the case of the dipsomaniac, a time comes when the victim is not only unable to help himself, but when others are powerless to help him; and so it was with Thomson.

and not the events of his outward life, that determines his fate. A man may rise above and dominate the most untoward circumstance, for these are but extrinsic accidents; but no man can rise above or fall below that intrinsic self, which for good or evil will manifest itself, whatever means may be taken to repress or suppress it. But for the close spiritual likeness between the two poets—a likeness so close indeed that one might almost believe that the soul of one had passed into the other—the mere outward resemblances in the circumstances of their lives would hardly be worthy of a moment's thought. I am not aware in all literary history of another instance of such close correspondence of temper and genius as we find between Leopardi and Thomson*. As the latter has shown, there were many striking points of resemblance between Pascal and Leopardi; yet, after all, there was a radical and profound difference in their natures. Leopardi sought for truth before all things, and when he had, as he believed, discovered it, he did not hesitate to proclaim it. Pascal, on the contrary, loved faith rather than truth; and when there was a conflict in his mind between them, it was not truth which triumphed. And Thomson, no less than Leopardi, valued truth above all things, and refused to content himself with the ordinary substitutes for it. Neither of them asked himself whether it was not

* Of course I speak here only of authors of more than ordinary talent. Many second-rate or third-rate men, as we know, have modelled themselves upon Pope, Byron, or Tennyson, and have produced works which would be considered highly meritorious were they not so palpably imitations, and not original creations. But, the reader may ask, was not Thomson himself, consciously or unconsciously, an imitator of Leopardi? The question, however, is one which has only to be asked to be dismissed by anyone who has a good acquaintance with the writings of the two poets. They agreed in essentials, it is true, and both arrived at the same conclusions; but they reached those conclusions by different paths, and the later writer never copied the manner of his predecessor.

better to accept without question the conventional beliefs rather than run the risk of unsettling his own and other people's minds by running counter to them. Nor did they believe that truth was a thing so precious that the knowledge of it should be confined to the aristocracy of intellect and should by no means be diffused among the ignorant multitude. It never occurred to them that it was quite possible to transform error into truth or truth into error by a sufficiently dexterous display of verbal jugglery. They were not content to live in a sort of twilight where, since nothing could be clearly discerned, all things assumed the same undefined and uncertain aspect.

That 'dominant thought' which forms the subject of one of Leopardi's most remarkable poems, and indeed of most of his writings—the thought namely of the wretchedness, uselessness, and nothingness of human life—was also the dominant thought of Thomson, and was expressed by him not less powerfully than by his predecessor. Of course it cannot be claimed for either of them that their thought was a novel one, since it was probably the first idea which occurred to the mortal in whom the power of abstract thinking originally manifested itself, and certainly dates back to the times of King Solomon and Omar Khayyám. What may, however, be claimed for them is that they realised this thought with a vividness of perception and an intensity of conviction, derived from their own experience of suffering, of which there were few, if any, previous examples. That was indeed all that could be required from them, since neither poets nor sages can now be expected to invent or discover new ethical or philosophical ideas. Perhaps it is seldom or never that we are interested in the poet's matter for its own sake: it is always the manner or the expression that counts. Strip Shakespeare of every shred of originality of thought—and it might be possible to do this—and his greatness would still be undiminished. What others had expressed feebly or ineffectively he expressed supremely well; he gave final form to what others

had uttered meanly or imperfectly. And what Shakespeare did on a scale as large as life itself, our two poets did on a more contracted stage, and with intellects more biased in their outlook, and less capable of seeing life steadily and seeing it whole.

With Leopardi and Thomson their 'dominant thought' was not one which, however strongly it might affect them on some occasions, could be dismissed at will and replaced by reflections upon the delights of the wine-cup or the pleasures of sensuality. It was not for them to exclaim—

‘Ah, fill the Cup :—what boots it to repeat
How Time is slipping underneath our Feet ;
Unborn To-morrow and dead Yesterday,
Why fret about them if To-day be sweet ?’

That was a mood which, after their first youth was passed, neither poet could feel, save on the rarest occasions. It is easy enough to refrain from troubling oneself about ‘unborn To-morrow and dead Yesterday’ if ‘To-day be sweet’ ; but when all days are sad alike, and there is no lifting or breaking of the black and sullen clouds of depression and despair, the misery of the present must needs be intensified by the thought of the wretchedness of the past and the hopelessness of the future. Most men and women, happily for them, have so little depth of thought and feeling that they recover easily and quickly from the worst misfortunes, and have so little imagination that they do not realise how much reason they have for unhappiness. They endure all things because they are unconscious, save in a dim and partial way, of their endurance of them. They are not made ‘desperate by a too quick sense of a constant infelicity.’ It is not for them to feel—

‘The sense that every struggle brings defeat
Because fate holds no prize to crown success ;
That all the oracles are dumb or cheat
Because they have no secret to express ;
That none can pierce the vast black veil uncertain
Because there is no light beyond the curtain ;
That all is vanity and nothingness.’

It can hardly be denied that a strong imagination and great depth of feeling are gifts which do not conduce to the happiness of their possessor. Without having some degree of callousness of feeling and of insensibility to the sufferings of others no man can exist comfortably or contentedly in the world. The mistake which men of unusual sensibility make—and which I think we must own Leopardi and Thomson made—is to believe that the thoughts and feelings which are peculiarly their own (not of course exclusively or altogether, but in their full force and vividness) are felt or experienced in a somewhat similar degree by everyone. But that of course is not so—nor, if the human race is to continue to exist, is it desirable that it should be.

‘A book,’ said Dr. Johnson, ‘should teach us to enjoy life, or to endure it.’ Were that an incontestable deliverance, it would be difficult, if not impossible, to justify the existence of the present work; and there is little doubt that Johnson, could he have read it, would have denounced it in his loudest tones and in his most emphatic phraseology. Yet, in spite of his orthodoxy, Johnson’s opinions—or, let us say, the opinions which he occasionally expressed—differed but little in the main from those of Leopardi. Such utterances as, ‘Life is at best a poor thing,’ and ‘No man is happy in the present unless he is drunk,’ contain the pith of all that was written by the Italian poet. The truth is that no hard and fast rule, such as Johnson laid down with regard to books, can be accepted without many qualifications. We do not derive any pleasure, in the ordinary sense of the word, from reading *King Lear* or *Othello*, or from seeing them performed; and certainly they do not ‘teach us to enjoy life or to endure it.’ Yet no one, not even Dr. Johnson, would condemn those plays because they do not conform to his rule. He would, of course, have hastened to qualify his dictum by saying that in the cases of these plays, and therefore of all tragedies, the elements of pain and terror which they contain are alleviated by the poetry of their treatment.

He would have urged, in effect, that the art displayed in such works supplies the element of enjoyment. That is true, no doubt; but if we accept it his aphorism becomes a thing of little or no significance. Every author must be allowed to write in the style to which his genius and his temperament prompt him; for if he does not do this it is certain that he will produce nothing of real value. Optimistic verse, or the poetry of hope and consolation, is of course to be welcomed and treasured; but it is remarkable that no great poet, not even excepting Wordsworth, is always and everywhere an optimist. I think it will be found that in all (or nearly all) great writers, it is on the note of pessimism that they dwell most and produce their greatest effects. We love and admire the comedies of Shakespeare beyond those of any other author; but it is of his tragedies that we chiefly think when we are estimating his genius. The comedies might conceivably have been written by another author, but not the tragedies; for these, we feel, come from the profoundest depths of his spirit. And if Shakespeare conceived of life as being mainly a tragedy, however it might be diversified by farcical interludes, by what rule shall we forbid other authors to look upon it in the same light? Unless a book mirrors faithfully the thoughts and feelings of its author it has no message of any value for the reader.

But though we must conclude that the pessimist is fully justified in expressing his views as powerfully as he can, the question as to their validity remains an open one. I am not about to attempt to settle the question, since it is one which, I imagine, never can be settled; but perhaps I may be allowed to say a few words about it on my own account. In my view, then, optimist and pessimist alike are equally far from the truth; or rather each of them mistakes a partial truth for the whole truth. Whether pleasures or pains preponderate in human life I do not know, but I am no less certain that life has some pleasures than that it has many pains. Of course I know that the pessimist will say that what men imagine to be pleasures are merely

illusions or delusions, and have no real existence. But if that is so it follows that the pains also are illusions, since we have just as much evidence for the existence of the one as for the other. As for the argument so much insisted upon by Leopardi, and so pithily expressed by Dr. Johnson, that no man is happy in the present, I confess that I see no force in it. I believe indeed that it has no force whatever, unless the word 'happy' is used in a forced and peculiar sense. At all events, I am certain that I have on some occasions—not too many, it is true—felt myself to be in that condition of bodily and mental exaltation which arises, not from any kind of intoxication, but from the conviction that it is good to be alive and to be able to play a part, however small a one, on so immense a stage, and (as Carlyle would or might have said) in the presence of the Infinities and the Eternities. Nor have I been troubled on such occasions by the thought that such a state of exaltation must soon come to an end. It must indeed—but what then? That it has been felt is much; and since it has been felt once why should it not be felt again? If to feel thus is not to be happy I do not know what happiness is, and indeed I do not care to know. Nor can I think that I am so peculiarly favoured that the happiness I sometimes feel is not shared by other mortals. The sources of happiness are many, even if they are not so numerous as the sources of unhappiness. Life, in short, if it is not an unmixed blessing, as most assuredly it is not, is not altogether the evil thing which the pessimist represents it to be. At any rate, since it must be endured—for the pessimist, like other people, displays no desire, or at least only a theoretic one, to put an end to it—it is better that men should cherish their belief in the possibility of being happy even if they never attain that condition.

I wish to thank very heartily the following persons, from whom I have received much assistance in my editorial labours: Mr. John W. Barrs, one of Thomson's most attached friends, who lent me all the

documents of 'B.V.'s' in his possession which related to Leopardi; Mr. Carlo Rota, whom I have consulted in any difficulty as to the proper rendering into English of the original Italian; and Mr. G. Thorn Drury, who has kindly read the proof-sheets, and to whom I am indebted for many valuable suggestions.

It should perhaps be noted here that the present volume contains a good deal more matter than any previous English translation of Leopardi's works. Besides the Memoir and several minor pieces, the *Pensieri* are here first completely translated, only a selection from them having previously appeared.

In the Memoir of Leopardi some extracts are quoted from Brandes. It should have been stated that these were taken from a memoir of Leopardi which is prefixed to a German translation of his works, by G. Brandes, published at Hanover in 1869.

MEMOIR OF LEOPARDI

• BY JAMES THOMSON

‘A fiery soul, which, working out its way,
Fretted the pigmy body to decay,
And o’erinform’d the tenement of clay.’

DRYDEN.

I PROPOSE in the following essay to give first some account of the life of Leopardi; then some short notes on his works of general interest, the *Poems*, the *Moral Essays*, and the *Thoughts*; and finally a few remarks on his genius and philosophy*.

The notices of his life I draw from his correspondence; and from the brief memoir or *éloge* prefixed to his works, by Antonio Ranieri, the intimate companion and friend of his later years, of whom Leopardi writes (*Pensieri*, 4): ‘One of my friends, indeed the companion of my life, a young man who if he lives, and if society does not succeed in rendering useless the gifts which he has from nature, will be soon sufficiently distinguished by the mere mention of his name.’ The correspondence, *Epistolario*, contains five hundred and forty-six letters from Leopardi to various relatives and friends; ninety-eight from Pietro Giordani, of which ninety-five are to Leopardi and three to his sister; and six to Leopardi from Pietro Colletta, the historian of Naples. But many of the

* What follows comprises only Thomson’s *Memoir of Leopardi*: the notes on his works, and the remarks on his genius and philosophy, were never written except that part which consists of a parallel between Pascal and Leopardi, and which here follows the Memoir.—*Editor.*

letters of Leopardi are merely complimentary, such as everyone is often compelled to write, without anything of his special character in them; and many others, particularly among those written home during the last six or seven years of his life, are but notes of a few brief sentences, telling the family little more than that he still lived and loved them.

The home family consisted of his father and mother, himself the eldest son, Carlo a year younger than himself, Paolina about four years younger, Pietro Francesco fifteen years younger, and Luigi several years younger. Of these all but Luigi survived him.

The following summary autobiographic notes were furnished by himself to Count Carlo Pepoli, in October, 1826 (*Epist.*, 301): 'Born of the Count Monaldo Leopardi, of Recanati city, in the March of Ancona, and the Marchioness Adelaide Antici of the same city, on the 29th June, 1798. Lived always in his native place until twenty-four years old. Had no teachers except for the first rudiments, which he learned under tutors kept expressly in the house of his father. But had the use of a rich library collected by his father, a great lover of literature. In this library passed the chief portion of his life, while and as much as permitted by his health, ruined by these studies; which he began independently of teachers, at ten years of age, and continued thenceforth without intermission, making them his sole occupation. Having learnt Greek, without a master, he gave himself in earnest to philological studies, and persevered in them for seven years; until, his sight being ruined, and he compelled to pass a whole year (1819) without reading, he took to thinking, and naturally became enamoured of philosophy, to which and the *bella letteratura* allied to it he has since been almost exclusively devoted. At twenty-four years of age went to Rome, where he refused the prelacy (*prelatura*) offered him by Cardinal Consalvi, through the earnest solicitations made in his favour by Niebuhr, then Envoy Extraordinary from the Court of Prussia in Rome. Returned home, and then went to Bologna.

‘Published in the course of 1816 and 1817 various translations, and original articles in the *Spettatore*, journal of Milan, and some philological articles in the Roman *Effemeridi* of 1822. 1st. Wars of the Frogs and Mice, translation from the Greek, Milan, 1816; reprinted nine times in different collections. 2nd. Hymn to Neptune (forgery), translated from the Greek, newly discovered, with notes, and supplemented by two Anacreontic odes in Greek (forgeries), newly discovered; Milan, 1817. 3rd. Second book of the *Æneid*, translated; Milan, 1817. 4th. Annotations on the Chronicle of Eusebius, published in 1818 at Milan, by Angelo Mai and Giovanni Zohrab; Rome, 1823. 5th. Odes on Italy, and on the monument of Dante in course of erection at Florence; Rome, 1818. Ode to Angelo Mai, when he had discovered the books of Cicero on the republic; Bologna, 1820. Odes; Bologna, 1824. 6th. Martyrdom of the Holy Fathers of Mount Sinai, and of the Hermitage of Raitù, composed by Ammonio Monaco, translation (in Italian of the fourteenth century, forged) done in the good age of the Italian language; Milan, 1826. 7th. Specimen of moral essays; in the *Antologia* of Florence; in the new *Raccoglitore* journal of Milan; and separately, Milan, 1826. 8th. Poems (various); Bologna, 1826.’

But this letter gives a very inadequate idea of the acquirements and literary work of his boyhood and youth. Ranieri tells us that he learnt without a master, not only Greek, but also French, Spanish, English, and Hebrew; his proficiency in this last enabling him to maintain discussions with certain learned Jews of Ancona. And I gather from a couple of passages in his writings that he had also mastered German. Ranieri goes on to say that his familiarity with Greek was almost incredible. When he deigned to reveal the prodigies of his mind, he confessed that he was more at home with the Greeks than with the Latins, or even the Italians. He had attained a sort of critical divination in respect to all Greek writers, both of the best and of the lower ages; and his judg-

ments were infallibly confirmed by more accurate texts or by the corrections of the most eminent commentators. Between his twelfth and his twenty-sixth year (mainly between thirteen and twenty) he wrote a marvellous number of expositions, annotations, glosses, commentaries of every description, on many classical authors, testifying to philological learning and genius seldom paralleled. The most important of these philological manuscripts, chiefly written in Latin, he handed over in 1830 to Dr. Ludwig von Sinner, who promised to revise and edit them, as the health of Leopardi would not allow him to undertake the work of redaction himself. Among them were a Commentary on the Life of Plotinus by Porphyry; Essay on the Popular Errors of the Ancients (which forms a volume in the Florence edition of his works); Fragments gathered from the Holy Fathers of the Church; Glosses on Plato, Dionysius of Halicarnassus, Demetrius Phalereus, Theon the Sophist, etc.; Dissertations on Moschus, the *Batrachomyomachia*, Philo Judæus, the Reputation of Horace among the Ancients, etc.; together with fragments on Celsus, Florus, Xenophon, etc. And we are assured on competent testimony that these writings are not the mere very clever essays of a youth; but are mature in conception, masterly in execution, and thorough in scholarship. He also partially translated Hesiod, the *Odyssey*, Simonides, Moschus, Isocrates, Epictetus, etc. Erudite Germans accepted as genuine his forged Greek odes, as did good Italian scholars his pretended text of the fourteenth century.

His brother Carlo says, in a letter to Prospero Viani, the Editor of the *Epistolario*: 'You show surprise that he could so soon have acquired so much, especially in matters of erudition. Certainly no one witnessed his assiduity more than I, having always in our boyhood slept in the same room with him; when, awaking very late in the night, I used to see him on his knees at the little table so as to be able to write till the last moment by the light which was going out.'

The first part of his correspondence, commencing in

April, 1816, is dated from his home at Recanati, where he lived until November, 1822. Of this part by far the most numerous and important letters are to Pietro Giordani, many years older than himself, and then esteemed the best prose writer of Italy. As Giordani made it a rule to destroy all letters received by him, those in the *Epistolario* (there are seventy-one in all), with the exception of the last four which happened to escape destruction, were printed from drafts or copies kept by Leopardi.

I must forewarn the reader that my selections will by no means do justice to the letters or to their writer: for as my object is simply to illustrate his life, that is to say his character and sufferings, I leave out passages of great intellectual interest on literature and other subjects; and moreover, I make him appear as one continually complaining, whereas he only dwelt upon these sufferings when writing to the most intimate friends and relatives.

When in February, 1817, he began his correspondence with Giordani, he was full of enthusiasm for learning and literature; passionately desirous of that fame to which he afterwards grew so indifferent; and burning to get away from Recanati, where no one out of his own family knew anything of or cared at all for literature, to one of the large cities where he might meet with his peers. In March he writes: 'I have very great, perhaps immoderate and insolent, desire of glory, but cannot endure that anything of mine which does not satisfy myself should be praised. . . . Do not speak to me of Recanati. It is so dear to me that it furnishes me with excellent ideas for a treatise on hatred of one's country. But my country is Italy; for which I burn with love, thanking heaven for having made me Italian.'

Giordani writes to the ardent youth like a good and wise man; and especially urges him again and again not to study overmuch, and to take as much bodily exercise as he can. But the evil was too far gone for remedy. The brain so prematurely vigorous had for more than seven years been extorting from the weak,

childish body such tribute of service and sacrifice as few of even the most powerful mature brains exact from mature bodies. Nor is it certain that any discipline in childhood could have much bettered the case. Had Leopardi been then kept from books in the interest of his health, the predominant brain, thus defrauded of its food, would doubtless have avenged itself. If an organisation is well balanced it naturally tends to develop itself harmoniously; if any organ or member is abnormally vigorous, it naturally tends to tyrannise over the rest and grow yet more abnormally vigorous at their expense, constraining the whole system to subserve its exercise. The gospel announcement is a deep general truth, whatever we may think of its religious equity: For unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance: but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath.

In April Leopardi writes: 'I do not study more than six hours a day, very often less; I scarcely write anything. . . . Who would have ever thought that Giordani would undertake the defence of Recanati? The cause is so desperate that the good advocate cannot save it, nor could a hundred. It is very well to say: Plutarch and Alfieri loved Chæroneæ and Asti. Loved them and left them. In this fashion I also will love my native place when far from it. Here literature is a word unknown. The names of Parini, Alfieri, Monti, and of Tasso and Ariosto and all the others, need a commentary. I tell you without pride that our library has not its equal in the province, and there are only two inferior. Over the door stands inscribed that it is also for the use of our fellow-citizens and shall be open to all. Now how many do you think frequent it? Never anyone. . . . At first my head was full of modern maxims, I disdained and spurned the study of our own language; all my early scribblings were translations from the French; I disdained Homer, Dante, all the classics; I would not read them, and plunged into reading which I now detest: what has made me change? The grace of God; but certainly

no man. What has directed me to learn the languages which were necessary to me? The grace of God. Who secures me from catching a crab at every stroke? (*ch'io non ci pigli un granchio a ogni tratto*)? No one. But make no account of all this. What is there beautiful in Recanati? what that a man can care to see and learn? Nothing. Now God has made this world of ours so beautiful, men have made so many beautiful things in it, there are so many men whom one not insensate burns to see and know; the earth is full of marvels; and I eighteen years old shall be able to resolve: In this cavern I will live, and die where I was born? Do you think that these desires can be controlled? that they are improper, arrogant, insatiable? that it is folly not to content one's self with seeing nothing, not to content one's self with Recanati? You have been wrongly informed that the air of this city is salubrious. It is most changeable, humid, salt, cruel to the nerves, and by its rarity (*sottigliezza*) anything but good for certain temperaments*. Add to all this the obstinate, black, terrible, savage melancholy which gnaws and devours me, and is fed by study and without study increases. I know well and have experienced, but now experience no more, that sweet melancholy inspired by beautiful things, more sweet than mirth, which if I may so speak is as the twilight, while this is dense and horrible night; is a venom, as you say, which destroys the faculties of body and mind. Now how can I get free from it doing nothing else but think, and living on thought without a distraction in the world? And how make the effects cease while the cause endures? What do you mean by diversions? My sole diversion in Recanati is study; my sole diversion is what kills me: all the rest is tedium. I know that tedium may do me less harm than does fatigue, and, therefore, often choose the tedium, but this, as is natural, increases my melancholy; and when I have

* Recanati, in the ancient Picenum, stands high on the summit of a mount (Monte Morello) between the Apennines and the Adriatic. Leopardi speaks of it as containing seven thousand inhabitants.

had the misfortune to converse with the people here, a misfortune which happens seldom, I return full of saddest thoughts to my studies, or keep brooding in my mind and ruminating the blackest melancholy. I cannot possibly remedy this, nor prevent the ruin of my very frail health, without getting away from a place which has produced the evil, and fomented and increases it more every day, and which yields no recreation to one who thinks.

In July of this year, 1817, Giordani, enraptured and astounded by the erudition and genius of his young correspondent, and quite free from jealousy in his noble love for Italy and Italian literature, writes: 'I have it firmly settled in my mind that you must be (and you only of all I know can be) the *perfect Italian writer*, whom in my imagination I have long since portrayed in a certain romantic style, like the King of Xenophon and the Orator of Cicero, and whom I held realised in you almost as soon as I had made your acquaintance.' And again in September: 'For pity's sake, by all that is dear in this world and the next, my dearest young Count (*contino*), give every possible care to conserve your health. Nature has produced, you have in great part developed, that *perfect Italian writer* I have in my mind. For charity's sake do not kill him for me.'

In August Leopardi writes: 'Firstly I am made unhappy by the want of health, because, besides that I am not a philosopher without care for life, I find myself forced to abstain from what I love, that is study. Ah, my dear Giordani, what think you I do now? I get up in the morning and late, for now, diabolical condition! I prefer sleeping to waking. Then I immediately set myself to walk, *and walk always without ever opening my mouth or looking at a book* until dinner. Having dined, I walk always in the same manner until supper; except that I have, often constraining myself and often interrupting and often abandoning it, one hour's reading. Thus I live, and have lived with briefest intermissions for six months. The other thing which makes me unhappy is thought. I believe that

you know, but hope that you have not experienced, how thought can harass and torture a person who thinks somewhat differently from others, when it has him in its power : I mean when this person has no relaxation or distraction, or only study, which fixing the mind and keeping it intent does more harm than good. To me thought has given for a very long time and still gives such agonies (*martirii*) by this only, that it has had always and now has me entirely in its power (and, I repeat, without any desire), that it has evidently harmed me, and will kill me if I do not change my position. Be quite certain that I, placed as I am, cannot divert myself more than I do, not diverting myself at all. In brief, solitude is not made for those who burn and consume themselves by themselves. In these last days I have been much better (in such manner, however, that anyone well falling into this my better would think himself dead) ; but it is the customary truce that has returned after a long absence, and already it seems about to depart, and thus it will be always with me while I remain in this position, and I speak from the continuous experience of six months and the intermitted of two years.' And again, the letter from which the above is taken having miscarried : 'I told you that although I have many desires, none ever has made or can make me unhappy ; that I am made unhappy by the want of health, which depriving me of study in Recanati deprives me of everything except thought, and thought has ever been my executioner (*carnefice*), and will be my destroyer if I remain in its power in this solitude.'

In September Giordani writes to him from Piacenza : 'How good you are, my dear young Count ! But never distress yourself or grow uneasy about me. Know that I am become callous to evils ; and hardly anything could befall me exceeding my patience. Were not my studious impulses very rare and brief, I should wish to escape from this poor place, where the want of books, even the most common, is really wretched and shameful. But since I do not care for reading except to regain sleep, which is the element of my life, I can

easily bear this want. In all the rest I have reason to be content. Here (as elsewhere) nobility ignorant and proud; priests ignorant and fanatical; infinite multitude of follies, miseries, and vices; a government that excites pity; but some men excellent and admirable, from whom I can continually learn; friends most loyal and dear; a few amiable ladies; much liberty of thought and speech. I hope to arrange my affairs so as to be independent and pretty comfortable. My sister is a great consolation, for she is the best heart in the world; of the sweetest candour; and full of love for me. I divert myself in exercising patience with my good mother, who is the most sublime and most disagreeable saint on earth; it amuses me to be able to boast that I endure a sanctity which would wear out the patience of the apostles and prophets.'

In the same month Leopardi writes: 'Of our numerous family there is one with whom I have been brought up from infancy (he being only a year younger than I), whence he is another myself, and will be always together with you the dearest in the world to me. He has a most excellent heart, with ability and knowledge of which I could say much if it became me to speak of them. He is my confidant in everything, and shares a little in my studies and reading: I say a little, because we differ much, not in disposition, for he loves the same studies as I, but in opinions. He loves you, as is natural directly one knows you at all, and he is the single one with whom I open my mouth to speak of studies, which I do often and would do oftener still if it could be done without disputes, brotherly but warm.' The Editor adds a note: 'Carlo; than whom I, although it has been my good fortune to know many illustrious men and to associate with them intimately, have not known one more able, more cultivated, more courteous, or more melancholy: real and worthy brother of Giacomo.' In November Leopardi writes again: 'Don't trouble yourself with trying to settle the differences between Carlo and me, for you would not succeed. Understand that this scoundrel won't hear the name of differences, nor admit that there really

are any between us ; you see how we agree. The controversies themselves cannot be put into writing, for they are infinite, and new ones spring up every day like *fungi*. It will be enough for you to know that the causes on the part of Carlo are little love for our country, little for the ancients, much for foreigners, and most of all for the French.' In the same letter he writes : 'As to love of glory, my doctrine is this : Love glory ; but first, truth only ; and therefore praises unmerited, and much more counterfeit, not only do not accept but reject, not only do not love but abominate : secondly, be assured that in this age doing well you will be praised by very few, and study always to please these very few, leaving it to others to please the multitude and be stifled with praises : thirdly, unjust criticisms, calumnies, insults, depreciations, persecutions, reckon as things not in existence ; and with regard to those which are just, let your only distress be for having merited them : fourthly, the men greater and more illustrious than yourself, not only do not envy, but give them your best esteem and praise, and moreover love them sincerely and valiantly. With these conditions the love of glory does not seem to me dangerous.'

In March, 1818, he writes, still to Giordani : 'For a very long time I firmly believed that I must die at latest within two or three years. But some eight months since, that is about the date I put foot in my twentieth year, I became aware and convinced, not flattering or deceiving myself, O dear friend, for with me self-flattery and self-deceit are only too impossible, that in truth there is not in me necessary cause of speedy death ; and that, provided I take infinite care of myself, I may live, although indeed dragging on life with the teeth, and using myself scarcely half so much as other men are wont to use themselves, and always in danger that every trivial accident and the least mistake will hurt or kill me : for, in short, I have ruined myself with seven years of mad and most desperate study during that age when my constitution was forming and should have grown strong. And I have ruined myself

unhappily and beyond remedy for my whole life, and rendered my aspect miserable, and contemptible all that great portion of man which is alone regarded by the many; and with the many one must needs have to do in this world: and not only the many, but all are constrained to desire that virtue be not without some exterior ornament, and finding it wholly destitute are grieved; and by force of nature, which no wisdom can vanquish, hardly dare to love him in whom nothing is beautiful save the soul. With this and other wretched circumstances fortune has surrounded my life, giving me enough openness of intellect to see them clearly and recognise what I am, and of heart to know that joy is not for it and, as if shrouding itself in mourning, to take melancholy for its eternal and inseparable companion. I know, then, and see that my life cannot be otherwise than unhappy; yet I am not appalled, and so may it be useful for something, as I will seek to support it without cowardice. I have passed years so bitter that I do not think worse can come: nevertheless I despair not of enduring even more: I have not yet seen the world; and when first I see it, and prove what men are, certainly I shall have to shrink back bitterly into myself; not through the misfortunes that may happen to me, against which I believe myself armed with an obdurate and robust indifference; nor even through the countless things that will offend my self-esteem, for I am thoroughly determined and almost sure that I will never bow down to anyone in the world, and that my life shall be a continual disdain of disdains, and derision of derisions; but through those things which will offend my heart: and especially I shall suffer, when, in addition to all the circumstances I have spoken of, that befalls me, as necessarily it will befall me and already in part has befallen, which is crueller than all the rest; whereof I will not write now. As to the necessity of leaving here, with that same study which has almost killed me, with that keeping myself secluded in perfect loneliness, you see how prudent it is! and abandoning me to melancholy, and leaving me to myself who am my most pitiless

executioner*. But I will endure, since I am born to endure; and will endure, having lost the natural vigour of body, to lose also the common good of youth: and will console myself with you, and with the thought of having found one real friend in this world, a blessing obtained ere hoped for. Your last letter is dated the very day on which last year I wrote you my first. A year, then, is completed of our friendship, which, if our natures change not altogether, cannot be dissolved save by that which dissolves all. Conserve for me my consolation in you, and remember that, as you are not more your own than mine, it is not allowed you if you love me to take little care of yourself. I am expecting your visit, and since it cannot now be in May, patience: but I hope you will recompense me for the delay by stopping longer when you do come. And when I have seen you, I shall be able to declare that not all the most ardent desires I have felt in my life have been vain. Addio.'

In September of this year Giordani visited Leopardi; as Viani tells us in a note, 'the two greatest geniuses and most perfect writers of our age embraced for the first time, and communed together for five days.'

In November Leopardi writes: 'You ask what I shall read this winter: *scilicet*, old books, because the new don't arrive here, and I at present always reading remain in total ignorance of affairs in the literary world. But into the classics, Greek, Latin, Italian, I immerge myself to the throat. Were not this letter already too long I would tell you of certain projects I have conceived. At present I will only say that the more I read the Latins and Greeks, the smaller grow to me our own writers, even of the best ages; and I see that not only our eloquence but our philosophy, and our prose altogether and thoroughly, both without and within, have yet to be created. A large field,

* The sentence stands thus in the original. There may be some error; the meaning, however, is clear. Some of these letters to Giordani are printed from drafts, not fair copies.

whereinto we will enter if not with much force, certainly with boldness and love of our country.'

In June, 1819, he writes: 'You ask about my studies, but for two months I have not studied, my eyes being bad; and my life is consumed in sitting with crossed arms, or walking about the house. Plans accumulate in my head, but I can scarcely even note them briefly on paper in order that they may not slip out of my mind.' And again: 'Of my health, I have more care than it or that of any man merits. Since March I am troubled by a persistent weakness of the ocular nerves, which prevents not only any reading but also any exertion of the intellect. For the rest I am well in body and mind, most ardent and desperate as ever, so that I could eat this paper whereon I write.' And in July: 'You cheer me up not to abandon my studies. But these four months they have abandoned me through weakness of the eyes, and my life is terrible. At an age when in general constitutions grow strong I decrease daily in vigour, and the corporal faculties abandon me one by one. This consoles me, because it has made me despair of myself.'

In this same month he writes requesting a friend to procure him a passport for Milan, meaning to escape from home; but the plot was found out and frustrated. Both he and Carlo had long been trying to get away openly, but the father would not give his consent, or at least would not grant any allowance for the support of his sons, and was not willing to let them leave without the means of livelihood assured beforehand. We are told that the family estate (one of the best in the province) was then heavily mortgaged, and that the mortgages were not cleared off until after the death of Giacomo; so that during his life the father was really poor in money, though the family could subsist in comfort at home on the produce of the land. Leopardi, however, expressly states in the first letter I have quoted that the rich library wherein he educated himself was collected by his father, and this in a man of the father's character seems a symptom of

pecuniary wealth ; and writes elsewhere that his father gives him all he asks for at home, and is very anxious that he should ask for everything he desires. He evidently believed that the will and not the power was wanting to support him away from home in the very modest manner he wished. In his letters home one observes throughout that there was not thorough sympathy and confidence between father and son, though the latter was full of dutiful respect and affection, and the former of really paternal care. The father (but I found this judgment only on the letters of Leopardi) seems to have been a worthy, prudent, methodical man, naturally conservative, more than respectably religious, holding firmly to patriarchal authority ; fond of good literature, or literature in good repute ; but not at all able to comprehend and sympathise with the character and genius of Giacomo : nor, indeed, with those of his other children, for in character and genius none of them was ordinary. His relations with them were probably analogous to those of the Rev. Patrick Brontë with his children, as divined through a discreet veil in Mrs. Gaskell's *Life of Currer Bell*. And I may here note that the mother of Leopardi seems to have had small share in the family government. There are lines of love to her, warm thanks for maternal gifts, but there is not one letter*.

In November he writes, still to Giordani : ' I am so stupefied by the nothingness surrounding me, that I know not how I have force to take up the pen to answer yours of the 1st. If in this moment I grew mad, I believe that my madness would consist in sitting ever with the eyes astonished, the mouth open, the hands between my knees, without either laughing

* Thomson was quite mistaken on this point ; though he wrote according to what was then known on the matter. The mother, in fact, was the real ruler of the family. She was an able and well-meaning woman ; but unfortunately she was quite unable to appreciate the genius of her son, or to deal with him wisely or generously.—*Editor*.

or weeping, or moving except when forced from the place where I happened to be. I have no longer the power to conceive any desire, not even of death; not that I fear this at all, but I no longer see any difference between death and this my life, so that not even suffering comes any longer to console me. This is the first time that life-weariness (*la noia*) not only oppresses and fatigues me, but afflicts and rends me like the sharpest suffering, and I am so terrified by the vanity of all things and by the condition of mankind, dead all the passions, as they are extinguished in me, that I get beside myself, considering that my very desperation is also a nullity.

'As to the studies which you affectionately urge me to continue, I have not for eight months known what studies are; having the nerves of the eyes and head so weakened that not only I cannot read or pay attention to anyone reading me anything, but cannot fix my mind on any thought, be it of much or little moment.

'My dear friend, though I no longer understand the names friendship and love, yet I pray you to continue my friend, and to remember me, and to believe that I, in so far as I can, love you and will love you always, and wish you to write me. Addio.'

And in December: 'I believed that the power of loving, as of hating, was extinguished in me. Now I discover through your letter that it still lives and works. After all, the world must be something, and I not wholly dead, since I feel myself again fervid with affection for your noble heart (*cotesto bel cuore*). Tell me, where shall I find one like you? Tell me, where shall I find another whom I can love as I love you? O dear soul, O single *infandos miserata labores* of this wretched one, you think perhaps that I am moved by the pity you show because it is pity for myself? Now, I am touched by it because I see no other life than tears and pity, and if at any time I feel myself somewhat less unhappy, I have then the power to weep, and I weep because I am more cheerful, and weep the wretchedness of mankind and the nullity of all things. There was a time when human wickedness

and the misfortunes of virtue moved me to indignation, and my suffering was caused by the view of evil. But now I weep the unhappiness of both slaves and tyrants, of the oppressors and the oppressed, of the good and the bad, and in my affliction there is no longer a spark of wrath, and this life no longer seems to me worthy of being contested (*di esser contesa*)*. And much less am I able to conserve ill will against the foolish and the ignorant, among whom rather I seek to confound myself: and since the routine, and the habits, and the occurrences, and the scenes of this my life are still infantile, I hold grasped with both hands these ultimate remnants and shadows of that blessed and blissful time when I had hopes and dreams of felicity, and hoping and dreaming enjoyed it; and it is past, and will return nevermore, certainly nevermore; seeing with excessive terror that with childhood the world and life are finished for me, and for all those who think and feel; so that none live on till death save the many who are children all their lifetime. My dear friend, sole person I see in this formidable desert of the world, I feel already dead; and although I have ever accounted myself fit for something unusual, I never supposed that fortune would leave me to be nothing. Therefore do not afflict yourself for me, since where is no hope is no place for inquietude, but rather love me tranquilly as not destined for anything, as one whose life is certainly over. And I will love you with all the warmth remaining in this heart benumbed and frozen.'

In March, 1820, he writes to Giordani: 'My dearest friend—I also am ardently sighing for the beautiful spring, as the one hope of remedy that remains for the swoon of my soul; and when, a few evenings

* Compare *Hellas* (written at Pisa in 1821):

'Spirit, woe to all!

Woe to the wronged and the avenger! Woe
To the destroyer, woe to the destroyed!
Woe to the dupe, and woe to the deceiver!
Woe to the oppressed, and woe to the oppressor!
Woe both to those that suffer and inflict;
Those who are born, and those who die!'

since, before going to bed, the window of my room being open, I saw a pure sky and lovely moonlight, and felt a mild air, and heard dogs baying from afar, some old ideas (*immagini*) awoke in me, and I seemed to feel a movement in my heart, whence I began to cry out like a madman, imploring mercy from nature, whose voice I seemed to hear after so long a silence. And in that moment remembering my past condition, to which I was sure to return very soon, as it indeed befell, I was frozen with horror, being unable to comprehend how life can be endured without illusions and vivid affections, and without imagination and enthusiasm; of which a year ago all my time was full, and they made me so happy, notwithstanding my afflictions. Now I am parched and withered as a dry reed, and no passion finds entrance any longer into this poor soul, and even the eternal and sovereign power of love is annulled with regard to me at my present age. I tell you these things which I would not tell to any other, because I feel sure that you will not account them romancings, knowing how supremely I detest the vile affectation which corrupts all that is beautiful in this world, and because you are the only person who can comprehend me; and therefore, being unable with others, I discourse with you of these my feelings, which for the first time I do not call vain. For this is the miserable condition of man, and the barbarous teaching of reason, that, our pleasures and pains being mere illusions, the affliction which derives from the certitude of the nullity of all things is evermore and solely just and real. And although if we regulated our life in accordance with the conviction (*sentimento*) of this nullity, the world would come to an end, and we should be justly called mad, it is yet formally certain that this would be a madness, reasonable in all regards, and that compared with it all wisdom (*tutte le saviezze*) would indeed be madness, since everything is done in our world through the simple and continual ignoring of this universal truth, that all is nothing. I wish these considerations could make blush those poor stupid philosophers (*poveri filosofastri*)

who find comfort in the boundless growth of reason, and think that human happiness consists in the cognition of truth, when there is no other truth than nothingness; and this thought, and the bearing it continually in mind, as reason would ordain, must necessarily and directly bring us into the disposition I have spoken of; which would be madness according to nature, and absolute and perfect wisdom according to reason.

And again, in the same month: 'So many things have yet to be created in Italy, that I sigh in seeing myself so imprisoned and fettered by evil fortune that I cannot make any use of what poor powers I possess. But as to plans, who could enumerate them? The lyric to create (and this in all languages, for the French too say that the ode is the sonata of literature); so many kinds of tragedy, for in Alfieri we have one only; eloquence poetic, literary, and political; philosophy fit for the present time; satire, poetry of every species suited to our age; even to a language and a style, which being classical and ancient would appear modern and be easy to understand and delightful to the vulgar as to the learned. In brief, the course to be run is infinite, and I who perhaps have received from nature some little strength to take part in the race, and reach a certain point, am always held back in the dungeons of fortune, and henceforth deprived of the hope of showing Italy something of which at present she does not even dream. . . . You ask me what I meditate and write. But this long while I neither meditate nor write nor read anything, through the persistent weakness of the nerves of the eyes and head: and perhaps I shall leave only sketches of the works I plan, in which I have done my utmost to exercise the faculty of invention, now extinguished in Italian intellects. And although aware of my own littleness, I shrink from having to leave undone what I have designed. But now I am really fit for nothing: I despise myself, I would hate and abhor myself if I had the energy; but hate is a passion, and I no longer experience passions. And this is the only reason I can

discover why I have not torn my heart from my breast a thousand times.'

And in November: 'When you are able I hope that you will write me more fully, as in your last you say you wish; for whenever I am long without news of you, and lack the comfort and support of your letters, I am as one who finds himself alone without a star on an infinite sea, but persistently and wretchedly motionless, since not even a storm interrupts the silence and tedium. I am now with much effort reading and scribbling, and my studies are no longer of words but of things. Nor do I repent having purposely begun by studying language, and afterwards thought, contrary to the usual order; for now if I have anything to say, I know how it should be said, and need not reserve it until the art of expression shall be acquired. Moreover the faculty of expression (*della parola*) aids incredibly the faculty of thought, levelling and abridging its path*. Indeed I have found by experience that even the knowledge of several languages is of wonderful aid to facility, clearness, and precision of conception. Poetry I have almost forgotten, because I observe, but no longer feel anything.'

In January, 1821, the preceding having miscarried: 'I am pretty well in body. The mind, after a very long and very ferocious resistance, is at last subdued and obedient to fortune. I do not wish to live; but having to live, what use to kick against necessity? This cannot be conquered save by death. I swear to you that I would have conquered long ago, if I could have assured myself that death was subject to my choice. Not having been able to do this, it remains for me to yield. Nor do I find now that any virtue becomes me, except patience, for which I was not born.'

'I read and write, and make so many plans, that to colour and complete those only which I have not merely sketched but delineated, I think four lives

* Compare *Prometheus Unbound*, Act II, Scene iii. (written at Rome about eighteen months before this time):

He gave man speech, and speech created thought,
Which is the measure of the universe.

would not be enough. While I comprehend and feel intensely day by day the vanity of human affairs, I am yet grieved and harassed by the consideration of how much should be done and how little I shall be able to do. Above all since fortune benumbs and fetters this one life which nature grants me ; and I see it slipping and evaporating through my hands ; so that while my projects would employ many lives, I have not as it were even one.'

In June : ' I had the letter which you wrote in my favour and the answer. For the one and the other I give you such thanks as I can, altogether inadequate to the obligation I feel, recognising you for that man stupendous and incredible, more concerned about the good and ill of another than about his own. Give me news of yourself, though I tremble to ask them, fearing they must be the ordinary and painful. But tell me, could you not change from Heraclitus into Democritus? This change is in course of progress with me who accounted it quite impossible. It is true that despair is imaged (*si finge*) smiling. But the laughter to which I am getting accustomed at mankind and at my own miseries, while it does not derive from hope, does not come from affliction, but rather from indifference ; which is the last refuge of the unhappy subdued by necessity, and despoiled not of the courage to combat it, but of the last hope of being able to vanquish it, that is the hope of (speedy) death. My health is not good, but tolerable, and such that in respect to it I should not need to despair of living to some result. I am slowly reading, studying, and scribbling. All the remainder of my time I spend in thinking and laughing to myself.'

In the same month Giordani writes to him : ' My health is ruined beyond remedy : for what hope of recovering from a disease of the nerves which has lasted more than three years? My unique comforter, the poor brain, is dead without hope of resurrection. My eyes cannot bear reading any longer : my afflictions are an ocean shoreless and bottomless, in which the joy of a world would be drowned. I endure

all this with a stupid patience, as one endures evils beyond remedy and hope, and excessive. Do not afflict yourself for me. Think, (as do I) that I am dead; save that I still love you ineffably; and will love you while a thought remains to me.'

Leopardi writes back in July: 'But you despair of your health, and I do not think you should. I for a very long time have had to lament the having a brain in my skull, for I could not think of the least thing, even for the shortest time, without contraction and anguish of the nerves. But as one cannot live without thinking, so I lamented that, having to exist, I was not a plant or a stone or anything whose existence is unaccompanied by thought. I say nothing of my eyes, which have reduced me to the nature of the owls, detesting and fleeing the day. And nevertheless these ills, though certainly they have not disappeared, are decreasing.' And then, in answer to Giordani's inquiry: 'My treatise will be on languages, and specially on the five composing the family of our southern tongues, Greek, Latin, Italian, French, and Spanish. There has been a great deal of discussion about language in Italy, and never more than now. But the best of the disputants, in my opinion, have rather stated and preached the philosophy of the subject than practised it. The subject, however, demands the utmost profundity of ideas whereof the human mind is capable, seeing that the language and the man and the nations are almost the same thing. . . . It is useless to build if we do not commence with the foundation. Whoever would benefit Italy must first of all show her a philosophical language, without which I believe that she will never have a modern literature of her own, and not having a modern literature of her own, she will be no longer a nation. Therefore the result whose attainment I would chiefly desire is that Italian writers should be philosophers inventive and suited to the age, which in brief is as much as to say writers and not copyists, nor need they for this be barbarous in their language, but Italian. This result many have made their goal,

none has attained it; and none, in my opinion, has sufficiently sought it. Certainly it never can be attained by that book which besides exhortation does not give a notable example, not simply of good language, but of subtle and deep (*riposta*) philosophy; nor simply of philosophy, but of good language; for the result demands both these means. So I shall seek with my dissertation to clear the way for afterwards treating in this language philosophic subjects which have never been treated in it: I mean philosophic subjects as they are now, not as they were in the time of innate ideas.' And again in August: 'Almost innumerable species of writing do the Italians lack, either altogether or nearly altogether; but the chief and most fruitful, and in fact necessary, are, according to me, the philosophic, the dramatic, and the satiric. Many and perhaps too many things have I planned of the first and last species; and of the last (treated in prose after the manner of Lucian, and applied to subjects much more grave than those grammatical trifles on which Monti employs it) I was preparing to complete a sample at once. But on better reflection I have resolved to wait. Anyhow we will try to combat the negligence of the Italians with arms of three sorts, which are the most powerful: reason, passions, and laughter.'

In 1822 there are but three letters before November, in which month he went to Rome, where he resided until the following May. He was in his twenty-fifth year, and the ruin of his health and strength had proceeded so far that he could not derive much benefit or enjoyment from the change.

In his letters home he always addresses his father in the respectful third person singular feminine*; Carlo

* *Vossignoria*, your lordship, your honour, equivalent to the Spanish *vuestra merced* or *usted*, being understood. Leopardi writing to a friend complains of this awkward ceremonious style of address, and says it is of Spanish origin. *Epist. L. 428, 6/2/29*: 'Comincerò dal riugraziarvi di aver dato bando a quel maledetto spagnuolismo della terza persona, etc.'

in the loving second singular ; Paolina at first in the friendly second plural, but ere long in the same manner as Carlo. These gradations, clearly marked throughout in the Italian, are lost in the uniform second person plural of our English.

Two or three days after reaching Rome he writes : '*Carlo mio*, If you think that he who is now writing to you is Giacomo your brother, you are very much mistaken, for that brother is dead or in a swoon, and replaced by someone who hardly remembers his name. Believe, *Carlo mio caro*, that I am beside myself, certainly not with wonder, for if I saw the very demon I should not wonder : and the great things I behold do not give me the least pleasure, because while I know that they are marvellous I do not feel it : and I assure you that their multitude and grandeur have become wearisome to me after the first day. And therefore when I tell you that I have almost lost the consciousness of myself, do not think of wonder, or pleasure, or hope, or anything joyous. Know, *Carlo mio*, that during the journey I have suffered all that can be suffered, as is the lot of him who journeys. . . . Nevertheless, all the journey I have had much pleasure, precisely in the suffering, and the carelessness as to myself, and the adoption every moment of quite new and dissimilar habits. And there remained to me still that morsel of hope of which I am capable, which without exciting, or even giving positive pleasure, is enough to sustain life. But having got here . . . I swear to you, *Carlo mio*, that the patience and the faith in myself, which through very long experience seemed to me invincible and inexhaustible, have been not only vanquished but destroyed. . . . In brief, I am sunken in such melancholy that again I have no pleasure save sleep ; and this melancholy, and being always in the open air contrary to my inveterate habitudes, overwhelm me, and extinguish all my faculties so that I am no longer fit for anything, have no hope left, wish to speak and know not what the deuce to say, feel no longer myself, and am become altogether a statue. . . . Attend, *Carlo mio*, I believe that if I could be with you I could still live, that I

would regain a little strength and courage, would have some hope, and some hours of consolation. In truth I have no society : I have lost myself ; and the people about me can never be society for me. Write me a long letter, and give me full and exact information of your state of mind, concerning which I have many doubts that torment me. Love me, for God's sake. I need love, love, love, fire, enthusiasm, life : the world does not seem made for me : I have found the devil much blacker than he is painted (*ho trovato il diavolo più brutto assai di quello che si dipinge*).'

On December 3rd, he writes : '*Cara Paolina*, what do you want to know concerning me ? Whether I like Rome, whether I divert myself, where I have been, what life I lead ? As to the first question, I no longer know what to reply, since everybody asks me the same thing a hundred times a day ; and trying continually to vary my answers, I have exhausted the vocabulary, and the synonyms of Rabbi. Speaking seriously, be quite certain that the most stolid Recanatese has a larger dose of good sense than the most learned and grave Roman. Be assured that the frivolity of these animals (*queste bestie*) passes the limits of the credible. If I should seek to tell you all the ridiculous things which serve as subjects of their talk, and which are their favourite subjects, a folio volume would not suffice. This morning (to mention but one instance) I have heard a grave and long discussion as to the good voice of a prelate who chanted mass the day before yesterday, and as to the dignity of his deportment in fulfilling this function. They asked him how he had managed to acquire these noble advantages, whether at the beginning of the mass he had felt at all nervous, and so on. The prelate answered that he had learned by long practice of assisting in the chapels, that this exercise had been very useful to him, that he had not been at all embarrassed ; and a thousand such extremely witty things. I then heard that several cardinals and other personages had congratulated him on the full success of that chanted mass. Reckon that all the subjects of Roman conversations are of this flavour :

and I do not at all exaggerate. Materially Rome would have great merit if the natives were five fathoms high and two broad. All the population of Rome would not fill the square of St. Peter. Journeying hither I saw the dome, with my short sight, at five miles' distance; and saw it quite distinctly with its ball and cross, as you at home see the Apennines. All the greatness of Rome serves but to multiply the distances and the number of steps you must climb to reach anyone you want to visit. These immense buildings, and these streets consequently interminable, are so many spaces thrown between men, instead of being spaces that contain men. I do not see what beauty there can be in putting chess-men of the common size upon a chess-board as large as your square of the Madonna. I don't mean to say that Rome appears to me uninhabited; but I do say that if men needed to live so at large as they dwell in these palaces, and as they walk in these streets, squares, and churches, the globe would not suffice for the human race.'

On the 6th of the same month he writes: 'Believe me, *Carlo mio*, that if our mutual love could grow, it would grow on my part, not only through the separation, which in hearts like ours causes great desire for the person beloved, but through the very living in the world and in turmoil, and through the very distractions and hindrances I have from thinking of you alone. For me indeed there is no greater solitude than a large assemblage; and because this solitude wearies me, I desire to be really alone, in order to have real society, that is you and my own heart. Attend, my dear brother: do not charge me with misanthropy, or cowardice, or bigotry; but be assured that what I am about to say to you has been taught me by experience, and by knowledge of your heart and mine. I say that in truth, if by some means you could attain where you are an existence less dependent and poor than you have now, you ought not to think of submitting to destiny and renouncing the greater part of happiness; but should be firmly convinced that you are, if not in the best, certainly in one of the best

positions possible to man. Ask me whether in two weeks that I have been at Rome, I have enjoyed even a moment of fugitive pleasure, of stolen pleasure, foreseen or unexpected, exterior or interior, turbulent or peaceful, or clothed in any shape. I will answer you with a clear conscience, and will swear to you, that, since I put foot in this city, never a drop of pleasure has fallen upon my heart; save in those moments when I have been reading your letters, which I assure you without any exaggeration have been the best moments of my residence in Rome: and even the few lines you subjoined to the letter of my mother were for me as a shining light cleaving the dense and mute and desert darkness around me. You will say that I know not how to live; that with yourself and others like you the case would be different. But attend to reason and the facts. Man cannot really live in a large sphere, his force and capacity of relation being limited. In a small city we may be dull, but in fine the relations of man to man and to things exist, because the sphere of these relations is small and proportioned to human nature. In a large city man lives without any relation at all to what surrounds him, because the sphere is so large that the individual cannot fill it, cannot feel it about him, and thus there is no point of contact for it and him. Hence you may conjecture how much greater and more terrible is the life-weariness (*la noia*) experienced in a large city than that experienced in small cities: since indifference, that horrible passion, or rather apathy, of man, has really and necessarily its chief seat in large cities, that is in the very great communities. The sensitive faculty of man in these places is limited to sight only. This is the unique sensation of the individuals, and is not in any manner reflected interiorly. The one way of managing to live in a great city, and which soon or late all are obliged to adopt, is that of making for one's self a little sphere of relations, resting perfectly indifferent towards all the remainder of the community. In other words, building around one's self as it were a small city within the great; all the rest of the said

great city remaining useless and indifferent to the individual. To do this one need not leave the small cities. This is truly a falling back into littleness by force of nature. Let us come to the proofs of fact. I pass over this, that I see tedium shadowing the visage of all the worldlings (*mondani*) in Rome. I will simply say this. You know that the unique fountain of pleasures is self-love, and that this self-love in the last analysis resolves itself into either ambition or sentiment. As to sentiment, you can imagine whether a dissipated multitude, who never think for themselves, can be capable of it. As to ambition, you must be convinced that in a great city it is thoroughly impossible to satisfy it. Whatever be the excellence you claim, beauty, learning, nobility, wealth, or youth, in a great city there is such superabundance of all that no account is made of them. I see every day men who would fill Recanati with themselves, and whom no one heeds. To attract the eyes of others in a great city is a desperate enterprise; and indeed such cities are only suitable for monarchs, or for such men as immensely surpass the greatest portion of the human race in something, generally the gift of fortune, as vast wealth, rank, almost princely, or the like. Not being one of these, you cannot enjoy Rome, or the other great cities, except as mere spectator; and a spectacle in which it is impossible for you to take part wearies you the second moment, however fine it may be.'

In the same month he writes to his father: 'As to the men of letters, concerning whom you question me, I really know but few of them, and these few have quenched my desire to know more. All would ride in a coach to immortality, as the bad Christians to Paradise. According to them the crown of human knowledge, indeed the sole true science of man, is Antiquarianism. I have not yet been able to meet with a Roman man of letters who applies the name of literature to anything but archæology. Philosophy, ethics, politics, knowledge of the human heart, eloquence, poetry, philology, all these are strangers to Rome, and are counted mere child's play in com-

parison with discovering whether some bit of copper or stone belonged to Mark Antony or Marcus Agrippa. And the best of it is that you cannot find a Roman who has really mastered either Latin or Greek.' And in January, 1823, to Carlo: 'Here in Rome I am not a man of letters (which title, even if deserved, is valueless with the Romans, valueless with the foreigners); I am erudite and a Greek scholar. You cannot think of what advantage to me have been those remains of philological learning which I have gathered and hunted up from remembrance of my boyish occupations. Without these I should be nobody with the foreigners. . . . I have therefore resolved to write some bagatelle (all erudite) which will appear very soon, and you shall be the first to have a copy.'

On the 20th February he writes to Carlo: 'Friday the 15th February, 1823, I visited the sepulchre of Tasso and there wept. This is the first and the unique *pleasure* I have had in Rome. The way there is long, and one would not go to the place except to see that tomb; but might not one even come from America to gain the pleasure of tears for the space of two minutes? . . . Many have a feeling of indignation on seeing that the dust of Tasso is merely surmounted and indicated by a stone about a span and a half in length and breadth, and placed in the corner of a poor little church. But I would on no account have this dust under a mausoleum. You conceive the tumult of emotions that swells from the consideration of the contrast between the grandeur of Tasso and the humility of his sepulture. But you cannot have an idea of another contrast, of that which strikes an eye used to the infinite magnificence and vastness of Roman monuments, comparing them with the smallness and nakedness of this tomb. One feels a sad and angry consolation in reflecting that this poverty is yet sufficient to interest and excite posterity, while the most superb mausoleums which Rome contains are regarded with complete indifference for the persons to whom they were erected, of whom one does not even ask the name, or if one asks, it is not as the name of

the person but of the monument. Near the sepulchre of Tasso is that of the poet Guili, who would lie *prop magnos Torquati cineres*, as the inscription declares. He made a great mistake. For him I had not even a sigh left. I could hardly bear to look at his monument, fearing to stifle the emotions aroused by the tomb of Tasso. *The street also which leads to that spot prepares the spirit for the impressions of sentiment.* It is all bordered with buildings employed for manufactures, and resounds with the noise of looms and other such machines, and with the songs of women and operatives at work. In a city idle, dissipated, irregular, as is a capital, it is pleasant to study the expression of reserved and orderly life occupied in useful trades. Also the countenances and the manners of the people one passes in that quarter appear somehow more simple and human than those of the others; and express the characters and habits of persons whose life is based upon truth and not upon falsehood; that is, who live by work, and not by intrigue, imposture, and deceit, like the greater part of this population.'

In March he writes to his father: 'Some time since I managed to get charged with the catalogue of the Greek manuscripts in the Barberini library; which catalogue was never made, or made most negligently, and the greater part of these manuscripts, which are not a few, remained unknown—I have undertaken this work in the hope of making some discovery, and in case I succeed in making any, of being able to use it to my advantage. This is most difficult here in Rome, where the librarians are as jealous and sordid as they are ignorant, and scarcely allow anyone the use of the countless manuscripts conserved in their libraries.'

In the same month he writes to Carlo: 'I send you one of the articles I have published here. It will seem to you quite frivolous: but know that it made the Prussian minister (Niebuhr) seek my acquaintance. He sent me polite messages by various persons: I called on him: he told me that this is the true method of treating philology, that I am in the right

way ; begged me earnestly not to abandon it, and not to lose heart should Italy not applaud me, for all the Italians are on the wrong road ; said that the applause of foreigners would not fail me, etc.' And again : ' You must certainly laugh as I do at the philology, of which I avail myself here in Rome, simply for the reasons I before gave you, and availing myself of it more and more recognise its frivolity.'

Niebuhr got him to write a memorial to the Roman Secretary of State, and took charge of it, earnestly recommending him for some good employment under the Government. This influence procured him the offer of rapid advancement if he would take the habit (become *prelato*) ; but this he had made up his mind not to do, as he writes to Carlo : ' For long since, and before coming here, I had resolved that my life shall be as independent as possible, and that my happiness cannot consist in aught else than in doing what I please. My nature is thus ; and I am convinced of it by so many experiences that I cannot any longer doubt.' And indeed he had written to Giordani in 1817 : ' God preserve me from the clerical habit with which they would muzzle me.' Niebuhr further tried hard to procure him secular employment under the Government, but was soon after withdrawn from Rome, and did not succeed ; and moreover Ranieri tells us touchingly : ' The supreme Niebuhr openly declared to the world his belief in the present and future greatness of the young Recanatese ; and in the name of most erudite Germany, which he so nobly represented, offered vainly to Leopardi in Prussia, what would not have been offered to him in vain, and never was offered to him by most wretched Italy, a chair of Greek philosophy.'

In May he returned to Recanati, which he did not leave again until July, 1825. There are very few letters in this interval.

In December, writing to his friend, Pietro Brighenti, of Bologna, who was getting some pieces printed for him, he says : ' As to the corrections, you can conceive how urgently I recommend to you the most scrupulous

and minute accuracy. The punctuation (in which I am always most hard to please) is regulated in the manuscript so diligently, that there is not even a comma which I have not weighed and re-weighed several times.'

In March, 1824, he writes to his relative, the Marchese Giuseppe Melchiorri, who had promised, on his part, some occasional verses: 'In my whole life I have written but very few and brief poems. I have only written these after being possessed by an inspiration or frenzy; which overcoming me, in two minutes I conceived the design and distribution of the whole composition. This done, I always await the return of a similar moment: and when this arrives (and ordinarily it does not arrive until some months afterwards) I set myself to compose; but so slowly that it is not possible for me to finish a poem, however short, in less than two or three weeks. This is my method; and if the inspiration does not come of itself, more easily might water spring from a log than a single verse from my brain. Others can write poems at will; but I have not this faculty at all: and how earnestly soever you asked me, it would be in vain; not because I do not wish to oblige you, but because I am unable.'

In April he writes to Brighenti: 'I, my dear friend, have a very great fault, which is that I do not ask leave from the friars either when I think or when I write; whence it comes to pass that when I would print, the friars won't give me leave. I thank you exceedingly for the trouble you have taken with my odes; and I feel doubly obliged to you, first for the labour itself, and secondly for the pains it must have cost you to dispute with that kind of people. You say right well that theologians are a sort of people as obstinate as women. It were easier to drag all the teeth out of their jaws than an opinion out of their head. Indeed, I think it would be better to have to do with women, and even with the devil, than with them.' He had already written to Giordani, in December, 1818: 'They write me from Rome that the manuscript, although very small, may not be able to pass

through the sieve of the censorship (and this will not be the last of mine that cannot pass the censorship at Rome).'

In May, 1825, he writes to Giordani: 'The more men in general seem to me plants and stones through the tedium I experience in their society, the more day by day I confirm myself in the thought that there is yet one with whom living and speaking I appear to live and speak with my like; or (to express myself less proudly) with a man; and this one is you: you, *the only man (and I swear it to you) who can make company appear to me more sweet than desperate solitude.* If I had not you to think of, the world would really become for me a desert, wherein I should find myself alone, without relation to anything. If it please you to write me, tell me that you are well, that you still love me; that I, already nothing to the world, and less than nothing to myself, am to you the same as ever; and this will suffice me. I study day and night while my health permits me. When it gives way I walk about my room for some months; and then return to the studies; and so I live. With regard to the nature of my studies; as I am changed from what I was, so my studies are changed. Everything impassioned and eloquent wearies me, has a taint of mockery and ridiculous childishness. I seek nothing but the truth, which once I so hated and detested. It gives me pleasure to more and more discover and lay my hand upon the wretchedness of mankind and all things, and to shudder coldly, meditating this dolorous and terrible mystery of the life of the universe. I now clearly discern that, my passions being extinct, there does not remain in studies any other source and basis of pleasure than a vain curiosity, the satisfaction of which, however, has much power to charm; a fact which of yore, while I still retained the last glow in my heart, I could not comprehend.

'You have sought to illustrate my obscurity with those friendly words written about me to Capponi. I indeed ought to thank you for having made me known

for a moment to Italy, as I have become aware by several circumstances; partly wondering, partly regretting to be believed better than a cypher through the words of a friend, without having myself given any sign, and without hoping to give any. But be assured that the season is passed, and that if even I was born good for something, as many are born, it is decided and irrevocable that what nature planted in me shall bear no fruit.

‘I am here (in Recanati) without hope of getting away. I would willingly plunge to live by chance, seeking to earn a little bread with my pen in some great city, but I cannot see a mode of getting as much as would keep me from dying of hunger the day after I left here. Thus then I content myself with neither doing nor hoping anything at all. Adieu, my soul. . . . I love you with all the strength of my torpid heart. Adieu, adieu.’

In July, 1825, he left Recanati for Milan, resting a few days at Bologna. He writes to his father: ‘I have been very much tempted to settle here in Bologna, a city most quiet, cheerful, and hospitable, where I have been cordially welcomed, and could perhaps find a way of supporting myself at little expense, engaging in some literary work that has been offered me and would not require great labour nor occupy too much of my time.’ He felt morally bound, however, to go on to Milan, having partly pledged himself to Stella the publisher there for certain literary work. He writes thence to Carlo the day after his arrival: ‘But I sigh for Bologna, where I have been as it were feasted, where I have contracted many more friendships in nine days than at Rome in five months, where people only think of living joyously without intrigues, where strangers have no rest through the kindly attentions lavished on them, where men of talent are invited to dinner nine days a week, where Giordani assures me I would live better than in any other Italian city except Florence, where I could live at very little cost, and to meet this would have several plans already settled and agreed upon, where, etc. etc.

Milan is not to be compared with Bologna. Milan is a specimen of Paris. . . . In Bologna the people are wasps without stings; and believe me, that to my infinite wonderment, I have been obliged to agree with Giordani and Brighenti (a good fellow) that goodness of heart is really found there, in fact is quite common, and that the human race there is different from that of which you and I had a notion. . . . It is of course understood that you have to write of yourself at the utmost length. Were it possible for you to have any doubt, I would say that distant or present you are always my same dear Carlo, unique to me, for not even in Giordani, with whom I may be said to have lived in Bologna, have I been able to find another Carlo, and certainly I shall never find one in my life.'

In August he writes to Count Antonio Papadopoli, then at Bologna: 'I find myself here very much against my will, occupied with studies which I abominate, and fallen again into my old habitual melancholy, without a single friend, and without any certainty of the future. Stella will have it that I must be the director of his undertaking [*Complete edition of Cicero*]. Little used and little able to deal with men, I am in great perplexity; on the one hand hating the tedium and inutility of this work, and sighing for Bologna; but on the other hand not daring or not knowing how to oppose the wish of Stella, because I am too much used to cede to the urgency of others, notwithstanding all the harm and inconvenience resulting to myself, and because Stella having paid for my journey from Recanati to Milan, I believe myself in a certain manner under the obligation to serve him. I will, however, make every effort to draw from my feeble and foolish nature the vigour required to disentangle me from these coils. I have hitherto become acquainted here with very few persons of merit, and of these none appears disposed to vouchsafe me friendship, except the Chevalier Monti.' Monti being the celebrated poet. A fortnight after he writes to the same: 'By long and firm resistance

I have succeeded in persuading Stella that he cannot induce me to direct, as he terms it, his confounded edition of Cicero.'

Towards the end of September he returned to Bologna, whence he writes to his father in the beginning of October: 'Stella, who let me go very reluctantly, has assigned me for the works done and to be done, ten *scudi** a month, to be paid on account, without prejudice to what further sum my literary labours may earn during the year. These labours are completely at my discretion, that is, I may write what I choose, letting him have my works.

'For an hour a day, which I spend in reading Latin with a very wealthy Greek, I get eight *scudi* a month. Another hour and a half I spend in reading Greek and Latin with Count Papadopoli, a noble Venetian, very rich, very studious, and a great friend of mine, with whom I have no word about money, but am sure that this will not be to my prejudice. Such is my position, which I will try for a while to see how it suits. I seek only liberty, and the power to study without killing myself.' A week later he writes to his father again: 'The payment I receive from Stella is only *on account* of the literary work I shall do for him, and if this be worth more he will pay me the balance at the end of the year. It is a great advantage to me to receive this payment monthly, instead of receiving full payment in one amount on the conclusion of a work, as it makes me secure of having from time to time a certain sum to dispose of. Moreover the choice of what I am to do rests thoroughly with myself, since Stella has repeatedly said to me that he only trusts that I will not send the works I write to any other than him. For the rest, that I write what works I please. It appears to me that there is nothing humiliating in these conditions. What I get from the Greek is perhaps a little less dignified, as is most wearisome to

* A *scudo* is an Italian crown; but the translator does not know what sum of money in England at present a *scudo* equalled in common purchasing power in an Italian city half a century ago.

me the hour I pass with him. Yet in the ideas of this city there is nothing low attached to the functions of a teacher; in fact all the lettered strangers here term themselves professors; and Costa, a noble of Ravenna, makes it his special profession to teach for money several youths, among them my Greek. Costa is one of the men of letters most celebrated here.'

On the same day he writes to Carlo: 'The tears come into my eyes writing your name. Who could express how I love you, and how I yearn to embrace you again! I speak of you as often as I can, and especially with this Papadopoli, who is a young man of almost your age, and whose principles are virtuous, generous, and heroic, like your own. He is a man capable of being a true friend; but no other friendship will ever, ever equal ours, which is strong in so many memories, which is as old as our infancy; which is such that if one of us asked from the other all his blood, he would be most ready to give it, and the asker quite sure beforehand of obtaining it. . . . I rise at 7, go at once to the *cass* for breakfast. Then study. At 12 go to Papadopoli, at 2 to the Greek. Return home at 3, dine at 5, generally in my own place, and if I am invited out am vexed. Pass the evening as God wills. At 11 go to bed. Such is my life. These lessons which disembowel the day annoy me horribly. Otherwise I have nothing to complain of.'

A fortnight later he writes to his father: 'I received by the last post a letter from Bunsen, in which he tells me on behalf of the [*Roman*] Secretary of State, who has charged him to do so, not to accept any proposition which may reach me from Tuscany or elsewhere, the Pontifical Government having its eyes on me intending to employ me worthily.' And on the 28th October to Carlo: 'I have a letter from Bunsen, wherein he speaks of the appointment proposed for me, which is the chair of eloquence, Greek and Latin combined, in the *Supienza* of Rome; and it seems that if I accept it, I can have it almost immediately. To-day I write accepting.'

Unfortunately, Bunsen's good offices and exertions

in Leopardi's favour were all in vain. Notwithstanding both oral and written promises the chair was given to another, much to Bunsen's disappointment and disgust.

On the 9th November he writes to Carlo: 'They mean to publish here the *Works of Count G. Leopardi*, complete, with portrait, biographical sketch, and in brief with all the ceremonies.'

On the 16th to Stella: 'The lessons I am obliged to give are two, and bring me in the one six the other four *scudi* a month. The pair occupy me three hours a day, from 11 in the morning till 2 in the afternoon, without reckoning the time it takes me to go and come.'

On the 23rd he writes to his father: 'To tell you the truth, I do not care much for that professorship, being little adapted for the like either physically or morally; and moreover I would rather not settle in Rome, where the air is so noxious in summer. Meanwhile Bunsen writes me from Rome that no further step has been taken, and that the ordinary emolument of the chair is 200 *scudi*; and were this not augmented, I really don't know how I could manage with an appointment not yielding enough to live on.'

By the end of this month he had lost both of his pupils, for he writes to Papadopoli, then at Rome, and tells him that the Greek has given up his lessons in Latin.

By a letter, dated 18th December, we learn that he was hard at work, hack-work, on a critical edition of Petrarch for Stella, renouncing for this the translations of Greek moralists he had wished to do. He accepts with cordial thanks Stella's offer of payment for the time heretofore occupied in giving lessons, so that he may devote himself wholly to literature.

On the 13th January, 1826, he writes: 'Dearest Father, I thank you very much for your promptitude in forwarding the tobacco, which I will send for at once, and which certainly arrives very opportunely. I likewise thank you for the loving offer of the benefice. As you say that you would have much pleasure

in giving it to me, I am not unwilling to take it, and am full of gratitude for your bounty ; were there no one at home to whom it could be given, I assure you that I would submit to any conditions in order to accept it. But now that, to my great joy, Pietruccio (his young brother) is eligible to receive the nomination, I may be allowed to accept it only on certain terms, which I hope you will find just or excusable. The first is that I would wish not to be obliged to assume any other *habit and tonsure* than what even the priests here use, consisting solely in a black or blue habit and a black neck-kerchief. The second is that I would need a dispensation from the duty of divine service because, as you must clearly see, this duty would almost wholly deprive me of the power of studying. I absolutely cannot read except in the morning. If this had to be spent in saying mass, there would remain no other time for my work. It would suffice me to be dispensed from divine service, even on condition of reciting an equivalent quantity of prayers ; since, except in the morning, I have nothing to do all day, and would very willingly spend some hours in fixed prayers, provided these did not have to be read. It appears to me that the case might be frankly submitted, together with the state of my eyes, to the authority having power of dispensation, and that there would be found sufficient reason for granting it. For the rest, were I sure of obtaining it, I would make no difficulty, should it be necessary, for some days at first to recite the divine office. I leave the matter to you, and you will know better than I whether and by what means such a dispensation can be promptly obtained. This is fine grave Italian comedy. Leopardi does not mean to accept, but he does not want to hurt his father's feelings ; in fact, to his father he always writes in a reverent spirit when any religious subject occurs in the correspondence ; and in writing to his father he continues throughout the serious use of some of the common religious phrases, which are never used in his mature letters to others, or used only in the merest conventional sense without thought of their primary

meaning; as when we say *Adieu*, meaning simply *Farewell*, without commendation to the care of God. So he agrees to take the benefice, but on conditions which he knows cannot be granted. If he is really glad that his young brother can take it, and is able to write thus composedly about saying mass and reciting prayers, the explanation I presume is to be found in the fact that he has been brought up under the Pontifical Government, that he has been used all his life to hear the clerical business spoken of as the best in the state ('all good things at Rome are for the priests' he writes in March, 1819), and knows well that outward conformity, not inward faith, is the essential requirement of an ecclesiastic. Leopardi a priest in his twenty-eighth year! Yet it is not impossible that the States of the Church could then boast hundreds of examples still more edifying than he would have proved, though edifying for different reasons. He is perhaps the one profound and subtle thinker of modern Christendom the most absolutely unrelated to Christianity; all or nearly all others having been related to it, at least by dislike and scorn, if not by love and worship, wrestling with it as a foe if not embracing it as a friend, and thus having a great deal of their life and thought occupied with it. But he, so far as I can discover (and as I shall have occasion to expound in the sequel), simply ignored it in his philosophy, as if philosophically it were non-existent.

On the 23rd he writes to his father: 'The very just remarks you make in your kind letter of the 16th, for which I cannot but thank you, fully prove to me the impossibility of conciliating my present mode of life with the position of beneficed ecclesiastic. As to the change of condition, although I set the highest value on your affectionate counsels, and on the reasons adduced in support of them, I must own to you with filial freedom and sincerity that at present I feel such repugnance to the change as to be almost sure that I have no vocation, and that I should prove little fitted for the fulfilment of my novel duties were I to undertake them. I foresee that it is not impossible, that

indeed it is more possible than perhaps you yourself think, that as I grow older my disposition will totally change, and lead me to that resolution to which now I am so little inclined ; but in this matter I think that I ought not to anticipate the effect of time, by adopting at once a course which I feel would be quite premature. As regards the benefice you can well believe that in seeing it bestowed upon one of my brothers I shall have the very same satisfaction as I would have in seeing it my own. In any case therefore I again thank you with all my heart for the goodness with which you have been pleased to refer the decision on this point to myself.

‘ Here we have not much snow, but very intense cold, which afflicts me beyond measure ; for my obstinate inflammation of the intestines and reins keeps me from the use of a fire, from walking, and from lying long in bed. Thus from morning to evening I find no rest, and do nothing but tremble and agonise with the cold, so that sometimes I could cry like a baby. In other respects, thanks to God, my health is good.’

On January 30th, 1826, Bunsen wrote to Niebuhr : ‘ Leopardi and I are become hearty friends, and I feel that we should draw still nearer to each other if he were but resident here, so that we might often meet and converse.’

On February 8th Leopardi writes to his father: ‘ Concerning the benefice, I have been told since writing my last that Rome sometimes accords to patrons the power of suspending the presentation of a new rector for six or eight years, and of meanwhile applying the income to some worthy use (*uso onesto*), the ordinary charges being first deducted. You will know better than I whether this is true, as I am assured it is. If yes, and if you have not already disposed otherwise of the benefice, and think you can obtain such a dispensation without too much difficulty and inconvenience, I should esteem it a signal favour of your bounty if you would avail yourself of this method to procure me the enjoyment, terminable at your good pleasure, of

this provision, which would indeed be very useful to me. In this way, without otherwise incommoding the family, as I do not incommode it at present, and hope in God I shall not be obliged to in the future, I should be still indebted to you and the family for an allowance which would put me in a comfortable position.' And finally on this subject he writes to his father on the 24th April: 'Thanking you, then, sincerely and earnestly for the goodness with which you have destined the benefices for me, and wish me to hold them, I confirm to you my resolution of renouncing them rather than bear the annexed and indispensable burdens.'

On the 15th May he writes to his friend the Governor of Recanati: 'My health continues endurable and nothing better, and be certain that in saying this I do not exaggerate, and that I am henceforth quite sure never to be well. This, however, gives no pain to me, and I should be very sorry were it the cause of affliction to you. We have so many ills in life, that to have health merely supportable is to be reckoned an advantage rather than otherwise.'

On the 30th he writes to Carlo: 'I have entered with a lady [*name suppressed*] into relations which form now a great part of my life. She is not young, but has grace and spirit that (believe me, who hitherto have thought this impossible) redeem the loss of youth, and create a marvellous illusion. In the first days of our acquaintance I lived in a sort of delirium or fever. We have never spoken of love save in jest, but live together in a tender and exquisite friendship, with a mutual interest, and a freedom, which is as love without inquietude. She holds me in the highest esteem; if I read to her something of mine, she often weeps from the heart, without affectation: praises from others have no substance for me; hers are all converted into my blood, and remain in my soul. She loves and well understands literature and philosophy; we never lack materials for conversation, and almost every evening I am with her from vespers until past midnight, and it seems to me a moment. We confide to each other all

our secrets, we reprove each other, we point out each other's defects. In brief, this communion forms and will form a well-marked epoch in my life, for it has disenchanted me of my disenchantment (*mi ha disingannato del disinganno*), has convinced me that there are really in the world pleasures I thought impossible, and that I am still susceptible of lasting illusions, in spite of the stubborn resistance of old knowledge and habit, and has resuscitated my heart, which had been asleep or rather quite dead for so many years.'

Brandes, in the memoir of Leopardi prefixed to the German translation of his poems, states that 'during this residence in Bologna Leopardi made the acquaintance of the Countess Malvezzi, a lady of great intelligence and uncommon culture, who herself studied the Latin writers, and was making a translation of Cicero's *Dream of Scipio*.'

On the 5th June he writes to Dr. F. Puccinotti with reference to a certain lady who had written poetry: 'If your counsels can influence her mind, as I believe they can, advise her strongly, I do not say to renounce verse, but to cultivate assiduously prose and philosophy. This is what I try to preach in this blessed Bologna; where it appears that man of letters and poet, or rather versifier, are synonymous. All would write verses, but all prefer to read prose: and you are well aware that this age is not and cannot be poetical; and that a poet, even a great one, could acquire very little renown: and if even he grew famous in his own country, would scarcely be known to the rest of Europe; because it is not possible to translate perfect poetry into other languages, and because Europe wants things more solid and true than poetry. Pursuing verses and frivolities (I am here speaking generally), we render express service to our tyrants: because we thus reduce literature to a sport and pastime; and in literature alone can the regeneration of our country have a solid beginning.'

In August he visited Ravenna for ten days. After his return to Bologna, on the 16th, he writes to Paolina: 'A little while since I was offered on the

part of the Secretary of State the post of vice-rector in the University of Rome, with the obligation of performing the duties of three chairs when the actual professors are unable (one of them is ordinarily unwell), and also of assuming the habit. I replied with many thanks and a refusal.'

In a letter to Carlo, 20th September, occurs a sentence of English in italics: 'You will find, at the same address at which I sent you the moral performances, another small book of mine.' He probably wished this kept secret between Carlo and himself, but we find further on that Paolina too had been acquiring English.

On the 6th October he writes to Carlo: 'It is true that your letters are sad, but they are dear and beautiful, and I love better to hear you lament than to leave you silent. Your style resembles that of Goethe in the memoirs of his life he has published lately. I comprehend too well all the pain of your condition, and see that you must suffer much more than I suffered, for in my case the internal activity consumed itself speedily by its own excess, and through the lack of physical force: so that the struggle ended, and I was left in the peace of old age. But you have still abundant bodily strength to sustain the activity of the spirit, and make you feel all the anguish arising from the opposition it encounters, and from the constraint to which it has been subject so long.'

In November, 1826, he returned home, where he remained until the following April. During this time he was busy with hack-work for Stella, preparing the *Crestomazia*, a collection of the best passages for thought and style in Italian literature, both in prose and verse. Returning to Bologna, he stayed there two months, and in June, 1827, went on to Florence, where Giordani was then living, and where he was warmly welcomed by all the lovers of literature.

On the 16th August he writes to Dr. Puccinotti: 'You must pardon my long silence, for I am seldom able to write, being afflicted with extreme weakness (or whatever it should be called) of the nerves of the eyes

and the head, which constrains me to an indolence much sadder than death. Certainly a corpse passes the day much better than I. . . . I am weary of life, weary of philosophical indifference, which is the sole remedy for life's ills and tedium, but at last becomes tedious itself.'

On the 23rd he writes to Stella: 'As to the criticisms you communicate on my *Operette Morali*, what would you have me reply? I will only say that they were not unforeseen. I am not aware that my principles are all negative; but should not be astonished to find that they are, for I remember the remark of Bayle, that in metaphysics and ethics *reason* cannot build up, but only pull down. I hope it is true that my opinions are "not founded on reason but on some partial observations."'

In September he meets Manzoni, and has much conversation with him, finding him 'a man full of amiability, and worthy of his renown.'

In November, fearing the winter of Florence, he went to Pisa, where he stayed until the following June.

On the 12th November, three days after his arrival, he writes to Paolina: 'I am enchanted with the climate of Pisa; if it remains thus it will be beatitude. I left at Florence a temperature of one degree above freezing point; here I find it so warm that I have had to leave off my cloak and wear lighter things. The aspect of Pisa gives me much more pleasure than that of Florence; this *lung' Arno* is a spectacle so beautiful, so spacious, so magnificent, so cheerful, so gay, that it enchants one; I have seen nothing like it at Florence, at Milan, or at Rome: and really I doubt whether in all Europe many such views could be found. Here then one strolls in winter with great pleasure, because here we have almost always an air of spring; so that during certain hours of the day the road is full of society, full of carriages and people on foot: you hear ten or twenty languages spoken: a brilliant sun shines on the gildings of the cafés and shops full of fine wares, and on the windows of the mansions

and houses, all of beautiful architecture. Moreover, Pisa is a blending of a great city and a small city, of urban and rural, a blending so romantic that I have not seen the like elsewhere. To all the other beauties is added a beautiful language. And this also is added that I, thanks to God, am well, that I eat with appetite, that I have a room facing west over a large garden, with an outlook so spacious that I can see the horizon, whose existence one forgets in Florence. The people of the house are good, the prices moderate; an excellent thing for my purse, which was not too well contented with the Florentines: and you must not think that I posted hither (as I informed you) to act the millionaire; I came in one of those little Tuscan diligences which are cheaper than hired vehicles.'

On the 31st January, 1828, he writes to Madame Tommasini, at Bologna: 'Here winter has been not only mild, but such that it has not deserved the name of winter. I was not aware of it, and to tell you the truth never end congratulating myself on this most blessed climate of Pisa, which seems to me more and more from day to day a paradise. Of my studies I know not what to tell you, save that I do not study at all: I only read a little for pastime, that is when my eyes allow me. They are better than they were in summer, but still not well, and show symptoms of turning absolutely bad in spring. These nerves of mine no longer leave me hope; neither eating little nor eating much, neither wine nor water, neither strolling half the day nor remaining continually at rest, in brief no diet and no routine benefits me. I cannot fix my mind on a serious thought for a single minute without feeling an internal convulsion, and without the stomach troubling me, the mouth turning bitter, and so forth.'

On the 25th February he writes to Paolina: 'I am always dreaming of you others at home sleeping and waking; I have here in Pisa a certain delicious street which I call the *Street of Memories*. I go there to walk when I would dream with my eyes open. I

assure you that in regard to imagination, I appear to have returned to my good old times.'

On the 2nd May he writes to Paolina: 'I have now finished the poetical *Crestomazia*: and after two years have made verses this April, verses really in the old style, and with the heart I had once.'

On the 5th he writes to Giordani: 'My health is always such that every enjoyment is impossible to me; the least pleasure would kill me; if I would not die, I must needs not live. . . . This past year you have been able to know me better than before; you have been enabled to see that I am nothing: this I had already told you often, this I tell beforehand to all those who desire to become acquainted with me.'

About the middle of this month his young brother Luigi died; and on the 26th he writes to his father: 'Among the many causes of sorrow I found in your dear letter of the 16th, one thing, besides the motives of religion, gave me some comfort; in receiving the full outpouring (*sfogo*) of your anguish, I hoped that such outpouring might mitigate it, at least for a short time. I cannot attempt to console you, I who am inconsolable myself. But among the thoughts which possess me all day long as to your state, I suffer deeply in imagining that you certainly have not yet made any effort to distract your mind a little from the remembrance which governs and tortures it. Dear papa, I am well aware that tender souls in such cases feel that they would be ashamed of themselves if they tried to forget their grief and did not repel all comfort: it appears a sacred duty to yield entirely and without any care for self to the afflicting thought. Yet I cannot but pray you to seek a little distraction, and you will find it less difficult to grant my prayer if you reflect that I beseech you for a motive as sacred and tender as is that which causes your sorrow; I beseech you not for your own sake, but for the love of us others who live in and by you, and who would feel our own life diminished and mutilated in your diminished health. I for my part can swear to you that, humanly speaking, I but live for you and for our dear family; I have

never enjoyed life except in relation to you ; and all my life now is not dear to me except in view of the grief the loss of it would occasion you. Try then to grant my prayer, and make the same to mamma on my behalf. I cannot tell you how much my present anguish is increased by the fear that the health of both must be injured through this loss. I too in these days have received the holy sacraments, you know with what intention.' And on the 2nd June : 'I have not put on mourning, wishing to avoid the innumerable questions it would have occasioned ; and which, coming from persons quite indifferent, would have been unendurable to my sorrow : so much the more that it is my character to hide in the depths of my being all intense afflictions and emotions.'

In June he returned to Florence, where he remained till November.

On the 19th June he writes to Madame Tommasini : 'As to my health, it is briefly thus. All my organs, say the doctors, are sound ; but *none* can be employed without great pain, because of an extreme and unexampled *sensibility* which for three years has most obstinately increased *every day* : almost every action and sensation gives me suffering.' On the 24th, to this lady's daughter, Madame Adelaide Maestri : 'I have a great mind to terminate once for all so many miseries, and render myself a little more perfectly motionless ; for in truth I get enraged now and then : but do not fear, for on the whole my patience will last till the end of this accursed life.' And on the 5th July, to Madame Tommasini again : 'By your most affectionate letter I am made aware that it was really imprudent of me to write to Adelaide those few lines which have caused you so much distress. The bile dictated them, and I let them pass : then immediately regretted having done so, and now regret it more. But as I then assured Adelaide, so now I swear to you, that my infinite love for my friends and relatives will always retain me in the world until destiny removes me : and on this subject we will never again speak. But I cannot express to you how I have been touched

by the affection shown in your dear words. I do not want honour, or glory, or any such things ; but I want love : you can imagine how greatly I esteem and value it, finding it thus warm and sincere in yourself and your family, all of whom I should love with my whole heart, even if I were not loved by you, because your virtues merit love in and by themselves.

On the 24th July he writes to Giordani : ‘ In fine, the superb disdain professed here for literature and all things beautiful begins to nauseate me : especially as I cannot persuade myself that the height of human knowledge is to know politics and statistics. Indeed, considering philosophically the almost perfect uselessness of all the efforts from Solon’s time until now, to obtain the perfection of political systems and the happiness of peoples, I am somewhat inclined to laugh at this fury of calculations and of political and legislative fantasies ; and I humbly ask whether the felicity of nations is possible without the felicity of individuals. These are condemned to unhappiness by nature, and not by man or chance : and it seems to me that studies of the beautiful, affections, imaginations, illusions, avail more than aught else to comfort this inevitable unhappiness. Hence it seems to me that what is delightful is more useful than are all the utilities ; and that literature is more truly and certainly useful than are all these most arid studies, which, even if they attained their object, would conduce very slightly to the real happiness of men, who are individuals and not nations : but when will they attain their object ? I should be very glad to be informed by one of our professors of the *science of history*.

‘ I hold (and not groundlessly) that human society has inherent and essential elements of imperfection, and that its various conditions are bad more or less, but none can be good. Anyhow, depriving man of what is delightful in studies seems to me a real injury to the human race.’

On the 5th August he writes to Madame Tommasini : ‘ As to my coming to Bologna this autumn, we will see whether I can manage it, considering my health and

the fact that I must go to Recanati. I have never told you the reason of this necessity, not having had the heart to do so. I will now tell you in two words: I have lost a brother in the flower of his age; my family in affliction looked for no other possible consolation than my return. I should be ashamed to live if aught but an extreme and perfect impossibility kept me from going to mingle my tears with the tears of those I love. This is the only consolation which remains to me likewise.'

On the 19th he writes to Stella: 'As the *Encyclopaedia of useless knowledge and of things unknown* still wants a good deal of work (not for the materials* but for the style), I see clearly that I cannot conclude it without employing all next winter in the task, winter being the only season in which my health allows me to work with sufficient assiduity. It would be indiscreet to ask that your monthly allowance should be continued until the conclusion of this work, and I am far from asking it. Yet necessity obliges me to beg you to arrange for its continuance to the end of this year, or at least to the end of November, when I shall be able to undertake the long journey home. In consequence of the continual danger of overheating myself and of inflammation to which I am subject, a danger that becomes very serious in travelling, I cannot make this journey at present (as I would immediately if I could), but must await the cold weather. Thenceforward your monthly allowance and our pecuniary relations must cease; but I do not renounce the right to continue serving you always for the future, as well in literary matters as in anything else, to the utmost of my small ability.'

On the 30th September he writes to Stella: 'I am really ashamed to have kept you so long waiting for the few wretched lines of introduction to the poetical *Crestomaxia* which you will find enclosed. You will

* 'Where are these precious materials?' asks the Editor of the correspondence; and the Translator can but echo the question.

hardly believe it, but the state of my poor health is so unfit for any application, even the slightest, that I could not compose these two pages without getting into convulsions and a sort of fever.'

In November, 1828, he returned home, and did not leave again until the end of April, 1830.

On the 17th December he writes to Papadopoli: 'I certainly do not like the staying at Recanati, and my health suffers very much through it; but my father has not the power or the will to support me away from home: I account my life finished.' And on the 31st to Adelaide Maestri: 'As to Recanati, I answer that I will leave it, escape from it, hurry away from it, immediately I can: but when shall I be able?' This is what I cannot tell you. Meanwhile be assured that my intention is not to stay here, where I see no one beyond our household, and where I should die of frenzy, of life-weariness, of hypochondria, if one could die of these ills.'

On the 16th January, 1829, he writes to General Pietro Colletta, the patriotic and exiled historian of Naples, with whom he had become acquainted in Pisa and Florence, and had contracted a warm friendship founded on mutual esteem: 'As you ask me to state my position, I will prove my gratitude and obey you at the risk of being wearisome. If I would live away from home, I must live on my own means; that is, not on those of my father; for he will not maintain me elsewhere, and perhaps cannot, considering the great scarcity of money in this province, where property is not current value (*dove non vale il possedere*), and the landlords use their commodities themselves, not being able to convert them into money; and considering also that our estate, though one of the greatest in these parts, is overwhelmed with debts*. Now I cannot live on my own means except by hard work; and with this health of mine I shall never be able to work hard again in my life. It was the consciousness of this that

* 'Just about the time of Leopardi's death the condition of the family estate altered.'—Editor *Epist.*

made me release myself from the engagement I had contracted with Stella, and thus lose the allowance I had from him, on which I was able to live decently ; it was, as I think you are aware, twenty Roman *scudi* (nineteen Florentine) a month. If I could get an appointment involving little labour, I mean a public and honourable appointment (and public appointments generally involve little labour), I would willingly accept it ; but I cannot get one in our state [*the Roman States*], where everything is for the priests and friars ; and abroad, what hope could a foreigner have of getting an appointment ? My literary schemes are the greater in number as my faculty is less for putting them in execution ; since, not being able to work, I pass the time in projecting. The mere titles of the works I would wish to compose take up several pages ; and for all I have materials in great abundance, partly in my head, and partly thrown on paper in the roughest fashion.'

In February he is corresponding with his friend Ferdinand Maestri as to a chair of Natural History at Parma ; being ready, in order to get away from Recanati, to qualify himself in a subject to which he had never given any particular attention. This project, however, came to nothing.

On the 26th April he writes to Colletta, in answer to a letter which is missing : 'The resource you propose to me, to imitate Botta [author of a *History of Italy from 1789 to 1814*], has many advantages ; but I confess to you that I cannot make up my mind to publish in that mode my mendicity. Botta had to do it for bread : I am not in such necessity at present ; and if I were, I doubt whether I should choose eleemosynary help or death by starvation. And do not think that this repugnance on my part springs from pride ; for firstly, such a course would make me vile in my own judgment, and thus take away all the faculties of my intellect ; and secondly, it would not accomplish its object, for living in a great city I should not dare to appear in any company, should not enjoy anything, regarded and pointed out with compassion. I desire

also extremely to live near you or with you, but to live at my own cost, not otherwise. I do not by any means refuse to be indebted to you; in fact, I protest that, both for your many past favours and for this most cordial and generous offer, I am and always shall be indebted and obliged to you. If I do not accept it, I trust that you will not mistake my motives; for I have not a friend or relative so intimate that I could accept from them the like; nor would I even accept from my father, if what I have from my father were not due to me. Beyond what is requisite for board and lodging, very little money (three or four coins—*monete*—a month) would suffice me; because I should be provided with clothes enough from my home. And in brief, with a couple of hundred or few more *scudi* a year, I could manage to live. But I would not have you give too much thought and exertion to this affair: for in fine (I well understand), if it is difficult to procure maintenance for one who can work, what difficulty must there be in procuring it for one who, in consequence of ill health or any other cause, cannot work.'

Leopardi's letters during the remaining year he spent at home are very few and brief: he was seldom able to write or think at all, and suffered horribly.

Colletta writes to him on the 31st October: 'Although ill I have done much work: the disease that afflicts me scorns to attack so slight a thing as my brain. I have written two books [*of his History*], and the other two, all that remain; will I hope be completed during next year. But I wish not to publish the work until you have read and corrected it. I have faced perils of death a hundred times without fear; but to offer to the public ten books of history makes me tremble. And now that a certain taste, so opposed to my style, progresses proud and triumphant through Italy, it is impossible that my books can please. I have always hoped that against the follies of the fashion the wisdom of Giordani and Leopardi would arise in two monuments, and that we scribblers might rest secure in the shadow of these great works. But

the one will not, and the other as yet cannot; the small and weak remain exposed to the darts of romanticism.'

And on the 11th January, 1830: 'My dearest friend, I was aware that your *Opere morali* would compete for the prize [of the *Academy della Crusca*]; and what I have said to my friends among the academicians you may infer from my affection for you, my sincere esteem for your merit, and my desire to have worthy books honoured. In addition to my former exertions I am now writing letters. Capponi knows you, prizes you, loves you; but he has not the influence you think over Zannoni; nor can Zannoni do what he will in that choir of canons. I hear Botta extolled: and certainly in quantity he surpasses all others: but what history! What a style! How our literature would suffer if he had imitators. If the academicians value what is pure and noble, and feel Italy's need of good writing, your works will be preferred, for in qualities of style you have no superior or equal. But the academicians will have singular logic and taste.' They in fact awarded the prize to Botta for his *History of Italy*. They however elected Leopardi himself to the Academy on the 27th December, 1831.

On the 2nd April, 1830, Leopardi writes to Colletta, answering a missing letter: 'My dear General, my condition would not suffer me to refuse the favour, however and by whomsoever offered, and you and your friends know how to oblige in such a manner that even the most sullen person would consent to receive a favour from men like you. I accept your offer, and with such confidence that not being able (as you know) to write, and scarcely to dictate, I postpone thanking you until I can do so by word of mouth, which will be soon, for I shall leave in a few days. Just now I will only say that, after sixteen months of horrible night, after a mode of existence from which God save my worst enemies, your letter has come to me as a ray of light, more blessed than the first glimmer of dawn in the polar regions.'

In April, 1830, he left home, never to return, and

passing through Bologna went on to Florence, where he stayed until October, 1831. Ranieri says: 'To this hospitable city at that period the most wise and virtuous men of all unhappy Italy repaired, either by choice or driven by destiny. This noble colony of strangers gathered around Giovan Batista Niccolini, Gino Capponi, and Giuliano Frullani. . . . Leopardi cordially loved both the strangers and the citizens, and was cordially loved by them in return: and to them all, under the gracious title of *his Tuscan friends*, he dedicated his most precious treasures, his poems, and prose works, in the beautiful edition there published, and his profound suffering in the affectionate letter prefixed.

'But neither friends, nor the spring, nor the summer, nor Tuscany itself with all its delights, could stop or even retard the unjust hand of Nature, to him as a stepmother, herself pitilessly destroying the most delicate of her works. The malady of Leopardi could not be defined; because, poisoning the most hidden springs of life, it was inexplicable as life itself. The bones softened and decayed ever more and more, lessening their support, weak as it had been, to the miserable flesh covering them. The flesh itself grew more meagre and arid day by day, the viscera that should have nourished it refusing the work of assimilation. The lungs compressed in too small a space, and partly unsound, expanded with difficulty. With difficulty the heart relieved itself from the lymph, weighing upon it through the slowness of the re-absorption. The blood, but half-renewed by the heavy and painful respiration, returned cold, wan, and sluggish, through the enfeebled veins. And in fine, it seemed that the whole mysterious circulation of life, moving with such difficulty, must stop for ever from hour to hour. Perhaps the great cerebral sponge, beginning and end of that mysterious circle, had absorbed irresistibly all the vital energies, and consumed by itself and in a short period what was intended to suffice for a long period to the whole. However this may have been, the life of Leopardi was no longer a career,

as with men in general, but more truly a precipitation towards death.'

On the 18th May he writes to Paolina: 'The portrait is most vile (*bruttissimo*): nevertheless pass it round, in order that the Recanatese may see with their bodily eyes (which are the only ones they have) that *the* — *Leopardi** is counted for something in the world, where Recanati is not even known by name.

. . . Not many months since a rumour ran through Italy that I was dead, and this intelligence caused here a sorrow so general, so sincere, that all speak to me of it even now with tenderness, and describe those days as full of agitation and mourning. Judge how I ought to prize the friendship of such persons.'

On the 26th June: 'I live quite close to General Colletta, and almost every day he is with me or I with him.'

He was publishing his poems by subscription, in order to raise money to live on away from home; and writes to Paolina again on the 9th September: 'Don't think of getting subscribers in your neighbourhood: there are already five or six hundred, and the number is increasing.' And on the 12th October to Pier Francesco: 'Oblige me by thanking one by one the six subscribers, and tell each that if he would like my book he shall have it gratis; because for several reasons Recanati people must not pay for it.'

On the 15th November he writes to Paolina: 'Dear Pilla, the foreigner who wanted the Eusebius is a German philologist [*Ludwig von Sinner*], to whom after many meetings I have made a formal assignment of all my philological manuscripts, criticisms, notes, etc., commencing with the *Porphyrius*. He, if it please God, will revise and finish them, and have them published in Germany; and he promises that they shall bring me money and a great name. You cannot think how I have been consoled by this occurrence, which for several days has recalled me to ideas of my first youth: and which, God willing, will give life and

* Epithet suppressed.

utility to immense labours which I have considered for many years as altogether lost, through the impossibility of perfecting such works in Italy, through the contempt in which such studies are held amongst us, and worse still through my state of body. This foreigner has vaunted me in Florence as a hidden treasure, as a philologist superior to all the French (the Italians are out of the question, and he lives in Paris): and says that he means to vaunt me in the same style throughout Europe.

Viani remarks: 'Here I suppress a long note, wherein would enter a little jurisprudence. I would fain hope, trust, feel confident that if poor Leopardi in his lifetime got neither money nor fame from these manuscripts (let us suppose through insuperable obstacles), another eighteen years will not pass before scholars can benefit by them, and the Italians (who are ready to publish them) have reason to love and venerate much more that peerless worthy.' Twenty-one years have passed since Viani wrote these words, and, so far as I am aware, Dr. Ludwig von Sinner (who may be dead) has not published any of the manuscripts.

On the 15th December, 1830, Leopardi wrote the letter to which Ranieri alludes, dedicating to 'his Tuscan friends' the Florence edition of his poems brought out in 1831: 'My dear friends, to you be dedicated this book, wherein I have sought, as often is sought in poetry, to consecrate my suffering, and with which for the present (I cannot say it without tears) I take leave of literature and studies. I hoped that these dear studies would sustain my old age, and believed that with the loss of all the other delights, of all the other blessings of boyhood and youth, I had acquired a blessing which no force and no misfortune could take from me. But I was scarcely twenty years of age when this my sole blessing was more than half withdrawn by the infirmity of my nerves and viscera, which, while depriving me of my life, does not give me hope of death; and then, two years before I was thirty, it was withdrawn from me entirely; and I believe henceforth for ever. You know well that I have not

been able to read these sheets, and that for their correction I have had to avail myself of the eyes and hand of another. I cannot suffer worse, my dear friends; and my consciousness of the greatness of my infelicity allows not the use of lamentations. I have lost all; I am a log which feels and suffers. Except that recently I have gained you; and your society, which stands me in stead of studies, and in stead of every delight and hope, would almost compensate my ills if my infirmities would allow me to enjoy it as much as I wish; and if I knew not that my evil fortune will ere long deprive me of it, compelling me to consume the rest of my years banished from all social solace, in a place where the buried dwell far better than the living. But your love will always remain to me, and perhaps still endure when my body, which has already ceased to live, shall be dust. Adieu. Your LEOPARDI.'

On the 23rd of the same month he writes to his father: 'Your suspicion is most just as to the possibility of bad faith in my German [Von Sinner]; but know that he himself, when we discussed the affair generally, warned me of this danger, and that for the rest his character inspires all possible trust. . . . I have sold the manuscript of my verses, with 700 subscribers, for 80 zecchini [nominally about £38]: in the actual condition, so doubtful, of trade, it has not been possible to obtain more.' In this year, 1830, there are but twenty-two letters from him, and these with two or three exceptions are mere notes. On the 19th May, 1831, he writes to his father: 'I am extraordinarily well through the extraordinary fineness of the weather, which here for three months and a half past has been perfect and uninterrupted spring. But neither eyes nor head have recovered the least atom of their faculties, lost certainly for ever.' By a letter dated 21st June, we learn that his father, who could not spare him any money for the merest necessities, had offered him an unsaleable paternal manuscript, selling which he might have the proceeds! He of course declines this generous offer with thanks duly grave and fervent.

On the 8th July he writes to his father with reference to the *Operette Morali* or Moral Essays (but our word moral is not equivalent to the Italian): 'God knows how grateful I am to you for the warnings as to my book. I swear to you that my intention was to write *poetry in prose*, as is the fashion at present, and so to follow now one mythology and now another at will; as is done in verses, without the writers being therefore accounted Pagans, Mohammedans, Buddhists, etc. And I assure you that the book has been so understood generally, and thus with the approbation of the severest theological censors has circulated freely in all the Roman State, and from Rome, from Turin, etc. I have had praises of it from most learned priests. As to correcting the passages you point out, and which at present I have not before me, I promise you to consider the matter seriously; but God knows whether it would be now physically possible for me, I do not say to correct the book, but to reperuse it. As to publishing a declaration or protest, you may rely upon the experience I now have in these things that it would occasion nothing but a scandal, and whatever might be dangerous in the book, would thus become only the more sought out, more noted, and more harmful.'

Ranieri says, p. 13: 'Having passed through a great sea of suffering, physical and mental, all the winter of 1830-1, he caught at the longed-for spring, and seemed again for a while to recover. But the ensuing summer made him so much worse, that the approach of autumn, and still more of the next winter, filled his friends with fear; and they advising him to consent to pass in Rome the two dreaded seasons, he went thither early in October. And after regretting for some days the Tuscan kindness and amenities (*là grazia e la leggiadria*), after he was improved and strengthened by that air and sunshine, he recommenced the old wanderings among the eternal beauties, and one day said smiling that he was friends again with Rome. . . . And nevertheless they have not known a Tuscan spring who do not comprehend that at the first flowers he saw peeping from among those ruins, he irresistibly

desired to return to Florence, where he arrived, in fact, on the approach of April.' On the 1st October, 1831, Leopardi writes from Florence to Paolina: '*Cara Pilla*, this very day, at noon, I leave for Rome, where, please God, I shall pass the winter. . . . I have a most pressing need of socks . . . to buy them in Rome would cost an abyss. Beg mamma to send me some, now that communications between Rocanati and the place of my residence will be easy. It is but a few days since I have resolved to go, so that I could not write earlier. And on the 6th from Rome: 'I arrived here last evening, after a tedious and troublesome journey, fresh and sound enough to not feel that I have suffered at all.' And on the 15th to Carlo: 'It is natural that you cannot divine the motive of my journey to Rome, when even my friends in Florence, who have many data that you have not, lose themselves in conjectures very far from the fact. Dispense me, I pray you, from recounting a long romance, much dolour, and many tears. If we see each other again some day, I shall perhaps have the strength to tell you all. For the present, know that my residence in Rome is to me as a most bitter exile, and that I will return to Florence as soon as possible, perhaps in March, perhaps in February, perhaps even earlier. . . . Be careful, I conjure you, not to let transpire that there is any mystery in my removal. Speak of cold, projects to make money, and the like. Excuse me for being so laconic, my heart will not let me say more; besides I have a little dozen of letters to write, and my eyes bad. . . . It is not the least of the annoyances I have in Rome, that I find myself as it were in my birthplace again; so many of the Recanatese rabble (*canaglia*, Fr. *canaille*), unknown in the rest of the globe, are in this city.' On the 22nd December to his father: 'I have already visited Monsignor Cupis, and he returned my visit, and showed me all sorts of friendliness, begging me earnestly to see him often, and promising to let me hear and read a thousand and a half that he has of sonnets, canzoni, and chapters of his composition; which he would then have me revise and

correct. This has so terrified me that, in spite of my goodwill to him and his courtesies to me, I have not had the courage to call on him again. . . . I assure you that to keep the list of the calls which in strict politeness (*convenienza*) I ought to make, freezes my blood. Absolutely with my legs always weak, in this city which never ends, with a pavement infamous, infernal, which in half an hour makes one feel more weary than that of Florence or Bologna or Milan in two hours, I cannot accomplish anything, either for duty or pleasure. And I have already renounced the hope of enjoying the infinite beautiful things of Rome, because these distances don't suit me, and the coaches and *fiacres* suit me still less.' (On the 24th to Von Sinner at Paris: 'I will certainly return to Florence at the end of the winter, and stay there as long as my poor means, already nearly exhausted, will permit: when they come to an end, the detestable and uninhabitable Recanati awaits me, if I have not the courage (which I trust indeed to have) to take the only reasonable and virile course that remains for me. . . . You perhaps expect me to tell you something of philology at Rome. But my health here has until now been so bad, that I cannot give you any satisfactory information on this subject, being obliged almost always to keep indoors. It is indeed true that I have often the honour to receive literary visits; but they are not at all philological; and in general it may be said that if they know here a little more of Latin than in Northern Italy, Greek is almost ignored, and philology almost entirely abandoned in favour of archæology. How can this be cultivated successfully without a profound knowledge of the learned languages? I leave you to think. There are not this year in Rome any foreign philologists of reputation. I see pretty often the good Minister of Prussia, the Chevalier Bunsen, who was friend of poor Niebuhr; he gathers every week in his house a society of scholars, by which I have not yet been able to profit, on account of my health and the distance he lives from me.' There are twenty-one letters from Leopardi in 1831, mostly brief necessary notes.

On the 2nd February, 1832, he writes to Paolina : 'I spend here an abyss, but the fault rests with who got me this lodging in the Piazza di Spagna, centre of the foreigners, where one pays fourfold, and is served by dogs, and robbed all the day. For the rest, in every way, Rome is the city of Italy (not excluding Milan) where for the greatest quantity of money one has the least of comforts and goods. Lodgings, above all, are exorbitantly dear in the winter. In summer it is another thing ; but Rome then is not habitable.' On the 16th March to the same : 'I leave for Florence, God willing, to-morrow. I have not been out of doors for nineteen days, but hope the journey will cure me. . . . I leave, for the rest, without having seen again St. Peter's, the Colosseum, the Forum, the Museums, or anything ; without having seen again Rome. Such is my health ; and I have been infinitely better than usual this winter, because we have had no winter.' On the 23rd to his father from Florence : 'I arrived here last evening, after six days of prosperous travelling, which, thanks to God, not only has not hurt me, but has altogether cured me of the remains of the cold. And it does not seem to me a small thing to have crossed the heights of the Apennines in the days of the equinox without taking harm, and to have traversed the horrid ways between Rome and Siena without being assassinated. Here all is tranquil, and it is impossible to express the feeling of peace and security one experiences in entering Florence ; while in Rome one is always quaking for the friends or relatives who are out in the evening ; no night passing in which some assassination does not occur, perhaps even in the Corso or the Piazza di Spagna at one or two in the morning.' Leopardi was elected member of the Academy della Crusca on the 27th December, 1831, and after his death in 1837 the then secretary, who happened to be a priest, the *abbate* Fruttuoso Becchi, recited his eulogium. On the 27th March, 1832, he writes to the secretary, Giambattista Zannoni, returning thanks for the honour, Vieusseux having handed him the patent on his return to Florence. One passage of this letter

breaks through the bounds of formality : ‘ My gratitude is so much the greater as I know my merit less. Indeed, I am aware of no merit in myself that could in any sense render me worthy of this prize, unless you would call merit the immense and ineffable love which I bear to this dear and blissful and blessed Tuscany (*beata e benedetta*), home of every elegance and all fair manners, and eternal seat of politeness ; which I ardently desire it may be conceded me to call my second country, and where may it please Heaven that I be permitted to spend the rest of my life and to render my last breath.’ On the 5th April to his father : ‘ From Giambene [at Rome] I have received all except the letter you say you sent me, the delay of which does not surprise me, considering the habits of the infamous post of that unhappy country [the States of the Roman Church], where continually and to all it happens to receive a letter twenty, thirty, forty days after that of the arrival which *is there marked upon it*, and this not for political reasons, but through a strange and inexplicable incapacity, for which one cannot find a name ; an incapacity unique in the world, and not to be paragoned save by the many others of that miserable and hopeless (*povero et disperato*) government.’ On the 24th May he writes the following important letter to Von Sinner at Paris. The first two sentences are in Italian ; then he breaks into French, as if wishing (as remarked by Sainte-Beuve) to address directly the European world of letters, to whom this language is common : ‘ I have received the leaves of the *Hesperus*, for which I cordially thank you. You say right well that it is absurd to attribute to my writings a religious tendency. Whatever are my misfortunes, which they have thought proper to expose, and which perhaps they have a little exaggerated in that journal—I have had enough courage to not seek to diminish their weight, either by frivolous hopes of a pretended felicity future and unknown, or by a cowardly resignation. My sentiments with regard to Fate (*envers la destinée*) have been, and are still, those which I have expressed in the *Bruto Minore*. It has been in consequence of this

same courage that, being led by my researches to a philosophy of despair, I have not hesitated to embrace it altogether (*tout entière*); while, on the other hand, it has only been because of the cowardice of men who have need to be persuaded of the value of existence, that they have sought to consider my philosophical opinions as the result of my personal sufferings, and that they persist in attributing to my material circumstances what is due solely to my intellect. Before dying I am about to protest against this invention of feebleness and vulgarity, and to beg my readers to employ themselves in attacking my observations and reasonings instead of accusing my maladies.'

On the 12th May he had written to the director of the *Antologia* of Florence: 'My dear Vieusseux, I declare that I am not the author of the book which some attribute to me, entitled *Dialogues on Current Affairs in 1831*. I beg you to publish this declaration in your valuable journal.' The subject of this curt disclaimer was the work of his father, to whom on the 28th May he writes with reference to it, saying that in Rome, Tuscany, Lucca, and elsewhere the book was generally attributed to himself: 'It is said to have wrought great conversions by means of this belief; so, at least, many have told me. And the Duke of Modena, who probably knows the truth of the matter, nevertheless says publicly that I am the author, that I have changed opinions, that I am converted, that so was Monti, and so are all the men of worth (*i bravi uomini*). And everywhere they speak of this, which some call my conversion and others my apostasy, etc., etc. I hesitated four months, and at length decided to speak for two reasons. First, it appeared to me mean to usurp in a manner what belonged to someone else, and especially you. I am not the man who could submit to adorn himself with the merits of another. If the romance of Manzoni had been attributed to me, I, not after four months, but the day I learnt it, would have set about contradicting the rumour in all the journals. Secondly, I will not and ought not submit to pass for converted, or to be classed with Monti, etc., etc. I have never been

either irreligious or revolutionary in acts or principles (*di fatto nè di massime*). If my principles are not precisely those professed in the *Dialogues*, and which I respect in you, and in whoever professes them sincerely, they have never been such as I ought or will disapprove. My honour demanded the declaration that I have not changed my opinions, and this is what I have intended to declare and have declared (in so far as is now possible) in some journals. In others it has not been permitted me. I believe that you will approve my decision.'

On the 26th June he writes to Paolina: "'I no longer think of my health," because health or disease no longer matters to me: for the rest, particularly as to study, I am nearly as usual, changed much morally, not physically. . . . A month and a half since I resumed a project, formed before my departure for Rome, of a weekly paper. Taking on myself the whole compilation, I was to draw fifty francesconi [nominally about £11] a month. Out of this sum (pretty considerable) paying the compilers, perhaps a third would have remained to me. Moreover, I should have received a third of the net profits of the enterprise, which, it was estimated, would be very large. I drew out and signed the prospectus. The contract was drawn out on stamped paper. The Government, for reasons which I have since learnt and which you cannot divine, resolved in a council of ministers to disallow the prospectus. It was no great misfortune for me, who knew well that my health would have permitted me to carry on the paper but a very short time; my intention was to do good to certain friends commencing the paper, which done, and founded this establishment which all foretold would be very lucrative, I would have left everything to them.'

On the 3rd July he writes to his father: 'As to the dry manner in which my declaration was worded, it was absolutely necessary, because no censorship would have let pass a word either favourable or unfavourable to the book, or to its doctrines, or to any part thereof, nor would have permitted the least shadow of discussion of the subject. Besides that, my relationship to the

author of the book was of such a nature as to exclude every manifestation on my part in whatsoever sense.

‘I am now about to speak to you on an unusual subject, as to which, while it is very unpleasant for me to discuss, it will not be at all unpleasant if my pleading has no effect. I think that you are convinced of the extreme efforts I have made for seven years to procure myself the means of my subsistence. You know that the ultimate destruction of my health came from the fatigues endured four years ago, for Stella, to this end. Rendered unable to read, write, or think (and, for more than a year, even to converse), I did not lose courage; and although I could no longer do anything, yet, with only what I had done already, friends encouraging me (*accretandomi gli amici*), I tried to continue to procure some means. And perhaps I should have procured them, partly in Italy, partly abroad, had not the extraordinary unhappiness of the times come to conspire with the other difficulties, and to render them finally victorious. Literature is annihilated in Europe: the publishers, some failed, some failing, some reduced to a single press, some obliged to abandon most promising undertakings. In Italy it would be now absurd to expect to sell with honour (*con onore*) anything literary, and to propose new enterprises to publishers. From France, Germany, Holland, whither I have sent a great quantity of philological MSS., with well-grounded hopes of profit, I but receive, instead of money, articles in the journals, biographies, and translations. I thus find myself, as you can well conceive, without the means of going on.

‘If ever anyone desired death as sincerely and earnestly as I for a long time have desired it, certainly none can have surpassed me in this. I call God to witness the truth of these my words. He knows how many most ardent prayers I have made to him (even to setting apart three and nine days, *sino a far tridui e novene*) to obtain this grace; and how at every slight hope of danger near or distant my heart sparkles with joy. Were death in my own hand, I again call God to witness that I would not have

troubled you with this pleading ; for life in whatever place is to me abominable and full of torture. But God not having as yet been pleased to grant my petition, I would return home to finish my days, if existence in Recanati, above all in the actual impossibility of occupying myself, did not exceed my gigantic powers of endurance (*le gigantesche forze ch' io ho di soffrire*). This truth (of which I believe the last bitter experience has convinced you also) is so fixed in my mind, that despite the great dolour I have in being far from you, from mamma and from my brothers and sister, I am unchangeably resolved not to come back to stay unless dead. I have an extreme desire to embrace you, and only the want of means for travelling has hindered and can hinder me in the propitious seasons : but as to returning without the material certainty of being able to leave after one or two months, my decision is settled, and I hope you will pardon me that my strength and courage do not extend to enduring a life altogether unendurable.

‘ I know not whether the circumstances of the family will permit you to make me a small allowance of twelve scudi a month*. With twelve scudi one cannot live decently (*umanamente*) even in Florence, which is the Italian city wherein living is most economical. But I do not seek to live decently (*umanamente*). I will submit to such privations that, by calculation made, twelve scudi shall suffice me. Better would be death, but death I must await from God. . . . If circumstances, my dear papa, will not allow you to grant this request, I beg you with the utmost sincerity and warmth to have not the least hesitation in rejecting it. I will follow another course, and perhaps I ought to have followed it without annoying you with this pleading : but as the course I allude to is such that, considering my health, it is probable that in a short time I should succumb, I have feared that you would have a reproach to make to my memory for having adopted

* The Roman scudo being 4s. 3·87d., twelve scudi would be nominally £2 12s.

it without first unbosoming myself to you concerning what I have here stated. For the rest, on the one hand I feel so much affliction in troubling you, and on the other I am so far from any capricious object, any cheerful hope, in my resolve to live away from home, that I have throughout wished and still would wish that the possibility were taken from me of any recourse to my family, so that as I cannot maintain myself, and still less can beg, I might find myself in the material, absolute, and rigorous necessity of dying of hunger.

‘Forgive me, my dear papa, this melancholy pleading, which it has behoved me to make to you for the first and the last time in my life. Be assured of my utter indifference as to my future on this earth, and if my request seems to you excessive, or importunate, or inconvenient, pay no regard to it.

‘At any rate, if God ordain that I live on, I will not cease to strive as in the past, with all my power, to procure the means of living without incommoding the family, and to do without the allowance I now request.’

On the 14th August he writes thanking his father for having granted what he asked in this lamentable letter: ‘For the permission you have given me, and for the kindness and cordiality you show me always, I render you what sterile thanks I can, but I earnestly pray God that He will render you for them abundant and solid fruits.’ He has seen Lamennais on his passage through Florence, and terms him a most able talker. On the 31st he writes to his sister: ‘*Pilla mia* . . . I have no news to tell you, except that I have again seen here your (*il tuo*) Stendhal, who is French consul, as you will know, at Civita Vecchia; and the other evening I conversed with the medical commissioners sent from Rome to compliment the cholera at Paris, and they promise us the visit of the disease to Italy: prophecy at which our doctors here laugh, because they do not believe in it: and I laugh with who believe and who do not believe.’ On the 11th December, after a few lines to his father, he

writes the following words to his mother, being all that I find directly addressed to her in the correspondence: to her as to his father he uses the ceremonious third person singular: '*Mia cara mamma*, your few lines have *moved* me (*mi hanno commosso*). God only knows what it costs me to inconvenience you, and how tender is my gratitude for your cordiality. I kiss your hand with all the affection of my soul. *Il suo Giacomo.*' There are twenty-four letters in 1832, all short save that to his father, which I have given almost at length, and to write which he must have made a supreme and agonising effort.

1833.—A note to his sister, dated 18th January, ends with these words in English: 'But, pray, how long is it since you have learned English? You surprise me. I can assure you that you write it perfectly. Should I be mistaken if I were to think that our brother has assisted you? I shall write and inform you as you wish. Adieu.' They were not commonplace young people who, secluded in the March of Ancona, learnt English without a teacher. On the 6th May he writes: '*Pilla mia cara*, a note of mine of two lines, unfortunately ambiguous, to a very intimate friend at Rome, who posted through here, has caused you others what you know, and me the ineffable anguish of hearing yours to Vieusseux. My dear souls (*cure mie anime*), God sees that I cannot, cannot write; but be quite tranquil, I cannot die: my machine (so says also my excellent doctor) has not life enough to conceive a mortal malady. I cease perforce, embracing all with immense tenderness. Give me at once news of all for my peace. Be *quite certain* that in any grave case you will never lack friendly information *from here.*' On the 7th July he writes: '*Papà mio*, I have been more than fifty days fighting with an ugly and menacing malady of the eyes, one of which was half closed. By means of a sage and simple remedy, the malign principle that I have in my blood seems neutralised in that part now. Yours of the 7th May caused me an immense anguish.

God vouchsafe that I may see you again soon.' On the 1st September to his father: 'For my health, which was never so ruined as it is now, the doctors having recommended as the best remedy the air of Naples, one of my dearest friends who is going thither has so insisted on taking me with him in his coach that I have been unable to refuse, and I start with him to-morrow. It gives me very great grief to go yet further away from you; and it was my intention to come and pass this winter at Recanati. But I know too surely that its air, which has always been hurtful to me, would be now extremely hurtful; and, moreover, the malady of my eyes is too serious to be trusted to the doctors and apothecaries there. I would have wished at least, lengthening the route, to pass through Recanati. But this is not compatible with availing myself of the very excellent opportunity offered me. Having passed some months at Naples, if I derive that benefit from them which I hope, I shall have at last the incredible pleasure of embracing you again. From Rome, where I shall be on Sunday evening, I will again send word. I am obliged to use the hand of another, because those few hours of the morning, in which with very great effort I could write some lines, I necessarily spend in medicating my eyes. Bless me, *mio caro papà*: I kiss your hand with all my soul.'

The friend alluded to in this letter was Antonio Ranieri, who merits well a few words here, having carefully suppressed in his Notice prefixed to the works of Leopardi all notice of what honours himself. I derive the information from G. Brandes, page 107 *et seq.* He was about eleven years younger than his illustrious friend, having been born at Naples in 1809. While yet a student he was 'advised' by the Government to travel; the reason, of course, being dangerous Liberal opinions. He visited Rome, Bologna, and Florence, which last, as we have seen, was the Italian asylum for patriots during the years 1820-30. He then went to Paris, where he studied history and philosophy, and where he was wounded in a street-fight

of the July revolution. He afterwards visited England and Germany, studying at Göttingen and Berlin, and writing a history of philosophy. In 1839 he published *Ginevra, o l' orfano della Nunziata*; in 1841, at Brussels, the History of Italy from the fifth to the ninth century; in 1842 *Frate Rocco*. He was the first of the sixty patriots whom the National Committee of Naples sent in September, 1860, to invite Garibaldi to take possession of that city. He was afterwards of those who went to Grottammare to present Victor Emanuel with the address of the Neapolitans. In Garibaldi's dictatorship he was made Superintendent of the Royal Asylum (*Reale Albergo*) for the Poor. He was four times elected Deputy for his native city, where he was Professor of History, having been offered the same post at Milan, and the Professorship of History and Philosophy at Florence. Cavour called him to the Council of State, Ratazzi in May, 1862, to the Senate; but he refused both and remained Deputy, and refused also (but this required no magnanimity) the Order of St. Maurice and Lazarus. He was a member of the Academy Della Crusca. Politically, he was of the Left Centre. His works were republished in three volumes by Guigoni, of Milan, in 1862-4.

• Brandes says, page 67: 'A young Neapolitan, Antonio Ranieri, ten years younger than Leopardi, had drawn near to the poet with intense enthusiasm. He had first sought him out at Pisa, then lived with him at Florence, and at last induced the poet to accompany him to Naples. Leopardi lived here also in the same house with Ranieri, alternately in Via Capodimonte, a high-lying part of Naples, and in a summer house belonging to the married sister of Ranieri, on the limit of Vesuvius, in the neighbourhood of Portici.' The same writer tells us that when Ranieri took Leopardi to Naples, the mother of the former was dead and his father regarded him as a lost son on account of his opinions. His sister Paolina (not to be confused with Leopardi's of the same name), then fourteen or fifteen years old, helped him in nursing and tending the poet. In the words of Brandes, page 110: 'How

both, united in true fraternal love, dedicated to the poor invalid, wasting away in years-long agony, moody and sensitive, their strength, their means, all their heart and mind, their days and their nights, up to the hour of his death in their arms, is above all praise.' Ranieri himself in his modest Notice tells us that the doctors and the most affectionate friends of Leopardi, in despair of any other human remedy, thought that if Rome had done him much good Naples would do him more. Yielding to their counsels he left Florence early in September, 1833, travelling by very short stages through Perugia to Rome, and recovering from the fever on his way. Here he stayed till the end of the month, and reached Naples the 2nd October, 1833. The air with the hearty and joyous life of the South proved very beneficial, and perhaps considerably lengthened his life. He had affectionate society among some of the Neapolitans, and was continually visited by the most learned strangers there. For a time he recovered marvellously the ordinary exercise of many vital functions which from his earliest childhood had been damaged, and he began to think that he might after all reach old age. He dwelt usually on the suburban hill of Capodimonte; but in May and October repaired to a country-box on the outskirts of Vesuvius. Threatened by a strange alternation now with phthisis, now with dropsy, he combated the one with the bracing air of Vesuvius, the other with the mildness of the air of Capodimonte. He frequently visited now Mergellina and Posilipo, now Pozzuoli and Cuma; from Capodimonte he descended to the catacombs, and from Vesuvius to Pompeii and Herculaneum.

On the 5th October he writes to his father from Naples: 'The false notice given by the French journals sprang from their confusing me with another person who bears my surname. As to my principles, I will not say anything to you except that if the events now occurring could have any influence upon them it would only confirm them.' There are but nine notes in 1833.

1834.—On the 5th April he writes to Mme. Adelaide Maestri at Parma, expressing his sympathy with Giordani, who had been seized and imprisoned there; he was released after three months' confinement. He goes on: 'I am cured of the disease of the eyes, but they are still excessively weak, and this is the only cause I have not written sooner, and why I now write by the hand of another. The air of Naples does me some good, but in other respects this residence does not very well suit me. I hope that we shall leave soon, my friend and myself. I know not yet for what place.' On the same day to his father: 'The relief which this climate has given me is scarcely perceptible: even after I have been enjoying the best air in Naples, dwelling on a height in view of all the Gulf of Portici and of Vesuvius, of which I contemplate every day the smoke and every night the burning lava. My eyes are under a treatment of corrosive sublimate. My impatience to see you again ever increases, and I will leave Naples as early as I can, although the doctors say that the benefit of this air can only be felt in the good season.' In subsequent letters he repeatedly expresses his desire to get away from Naples and to visit his home, but there are always obstacles which he cannot overcome, want of money, bad health, inability to sublet his lodgings, which being taken unfurnished had to be leased by the year. There are also frequent complaints of the inexplicable detention of letters by the postal authorities; the administration of Naples in such matters seeming to have been about as bad as that of clerical Rome, which was bad indeed. On the 27th November he writes to his father: 'Nevertheless, if this affair of the house can be settled, as I hope it can, and much more if my friend Ranieri, as is probable, makes up his mind to leave for Rome next month, I am quite resolved to set out in spite of the cold; for, in addition to my impatience to see you again, I can no longer endure this semi-barbarous and semi-African country, in which I live thoroughly isolated from everybody. For the rest, you must not wonder at my delays, seeing that here every affair of a pin

involves an eternity of time, and it is as difficult to get out of this place as to live in it without bursting with *ennui*. My health, thanks to God, is very tolerable, and at length I read a little, and write, owing, I believe, to the unusual fineness of the present and past seasons.' Brandes states that at this period he composed the last *Canzoni*, *Il tramonto della luna* and *La Ginestra*, and wrote also various smaller prose pieces, the *Copernicus*, the *Dialogue of Plotinus and Porphyry*, as well as a large number of the *Thoughts*; giving himself specially, however, to the completion of the satiric political epic, *Paralipomeni della Batracomyomachia*, or continuation of the Homeric Wars of the Frogs and Mice. There are but five letters in 1834.

1835.—On the 3rd February he writes to his father (having only that day received one from home dated 4th December, 1834, and stamped as arriving at Naples on the 11th of the *same month*): 'Be assured that, as early as it shall be humanly possible, I will start for Recanati, being in the depth of my soul most impatient to see you again, besides the need I have to escape from these *lazzaroni* and buffoons, noble and plebeian, all thieves and *b.f.*, right worthy of the *Spagnuoli* and the gallows. My health, thanks to God, continues to improve notably; effect, I believe, of the good season rather than of the climate.' On the 25th April he writes to his father about a literary enterprise which he believes Ranieri has succeeded in founding, in which he himself will take part with his name and with some assistance in fact, and which he hopes will furnish him the means of getting away, when once it is fairly started; he then goes on: 'From your last I learnt with sharp displeasure the bad payment rendered you by the priests for the expense at which you have defended their cause. But men are always and everywhere men, that is, traitors, and cowardly villains (*vigliaccamente malvagi*). I continue, thanks to God, pretty well, in spite of an infamous season we have had here, after a terrible explosion of Vesuvius, which, in the evening of the 1st of this month, terrified all the city.' He concludes: 'My dear mamma, Carlo, Pao-

lina, Pietruccio, I beg you to wish well, and sometimes write, to your Giacomo, who has little strength in the eyes, but not little love in the heart.' On the 2nd May he writes to Madame Antoinetta Tommasini, at Parma: 'Tell me something of Giordani, about whom everybody here asks me, and mostly in vain, nothing in the world being known here except by chance. Say to him on my behalf the most friendly things you can. . . . My health, either by benefit of this climate, or of the wholesome situation in which I live, or by some other cause, is wonderfully improved; and this winter I have even been able to read, think, and write a little.' On the 19th September to his father: 'With the worthy Matteo Antici, who is still here, I have the consolation of speaking continually of you, mamma, my brothers and sister; to see you all again, and have your love as you have mine, is the *greatest* desire I have on earth.' On the 4th December to his father: 'Be assured that the corrections necessary to the Moral Essays, by you so kindly suggested, shall be made, if indeed this edition is carried forward, as to which I have much doubt, because I am quite decided to give nothing to the publisher, not only gratis, but even without prepayment; all my friends advising me that it is needful to act thus in this country of thieves; while, on the other hand, these publishers, half ruined, rest speechless at simply hearing the word prepayment. *The History of Naples*, of which I sent the first part, is by my friend Ranieri, who makes it a present to the Leopardi library.' And on the same day to Paolina: 'I knew that Recanati had the streets paved, and that the fronts of the Monaci and the Palazzo Luciani have been restored; but likewise Bath Post and stamped sealing wafers? It is clear that civilisation is making great progress everywhere. You say that there are a million things of which you want to write me, but meanwhile you have been more than a year without writing me anything. It is true that I write little, but you all know the reason; and you who can write much, ought not to take it in your head to treat me as I treat you, but, without counting my letters, write to me frequently,

without thinking of the *carlino* [about fourpence] that your letter will cost me, because n6 *carlino* seems to me so well spent. Kiss mamma's hand for me, and greet Carlo and Pietruccio, who I know reads much ; and yet he might now and then remember his eldest brother, and send word. I, *cara Pilla*, die of melancholy whenever I think of the long time I have passed without seeing you others again ; when you see me again, your accusations will stop. If it were necessary, I would tell you that I am not changed by a zero towards you others : but between us such things are not said save in jest, and I laughing say it.' There are seven letters in 1835.

1836.—On the 19th February he writes to his father : 'I have been much grieved to see that the Legitimacy shows itself so little grateful to your pen, for all that it has combated for that cause. I say grieved, but not surprised : because such is the habit of the men of all parties, and because the Legitimists (if you will allow me to say so) do not much like to have their cause defended with words, seeing that the mere admission that on the terrestrial globe there is anybody who doubts the plenitude of their rights much exceeds the liberty which should be vouchsafed to the pens of mortals : besides, that they very sagely prefer to reasonings, which, good or bad, may always be answered, the arguments of cannon and imprisonment, to which their adversaries at present can make no reply. . . . My health, notwithstanding the bad season, is always, thanks to God, very fair. I desire to learn that it has been the same with you all in this year, notable everywhere for diseases. I hope to have the immense blessing of seeing again yourself, mamma, and the others towards the middle of May, reckoning to leave here in the beginning of that month or the end of April. Ranieri tenders his respects, and at the first opportunity will send you the other four parts, now printed, of his History.' On the 5th March to Madame Adelaide Maestri, at Parma : 'For the last year and a half I cannot but felicitate myself on my health, but above all that, about a year since I came to

dwell in a part of this city almost rural, very elevated, with very dry air, and really healthy. I scribble on, not so much as for pastime I would wish ; because I have to assist in a collection being prepared here of my trifles (*bagatelle*) ; the first volume of which (in great part, like the others, previously unpublished) is the book I sent to Giordani.' On the 11th December to his father, from the country-house: 'The tone of your letters, somewhat dry, is most just in one who unfortunately cannot know my real condition, because I have never had the eyes to write a letter which cannot be dictated, and which must be interminable (*infinita*), and because certain things must not be written, but told only by word of mouth. You certainly think that I have passed among the roses these seven years which I have passed among the sea-rushes. . . . ' [This seems to be an allusion to Dante : *Purg.*, canto i., as well as to Naples, implying that he had commenced his Purgatory in life.]

'It has been a great consolation to me to learn that the pest, called by the politeness of the age cholera, has made little impression with you. Here, omitting the rest of the sad story, which my eyes will not allow me to narrate, after more than fifty days (I mean in Naples city) the malady appeared almost to cease ; but in these last days the mortality has again risen. I have notably suffered in health from the humidity of this little house in the bad season ; nor can I return to Naples, because whoever arrives there after a long absence is inevitably a victim of the plague ; which for the rest has also gained the country, and in my neighbourhood several persons have died of it.

'*Mio caro papà*, if God grants me to see you again, yourself and mamma and the others will know that in these seven years I have not forfeited the least particle of your former goodwill, unless one's miseries decrease love in parents and brethren, as they extinguish it in all other men. If I die before, my justification shall be confided to Providence: God grant you all in the approaching festivities that joy which I shall hardly feel. The last news from Naples and the suburbs as to

the cholera, to-day, the 15th, are good.' There are but four letters in 1836, and this last seems to have taken him five days to write.

1837.—On the 9th March he writes to his father: 'I, thanks to God, have escaped the cholera, but at great cost. After having passed in the country several months amidst incredible agonies, running every day six perils of life well counted, imminent and realisable from hour to hour, and after having endured such cold as I never experienced in any other winter, if not that at Bologna; my poor machine, ten years older than at Bologna, could not resist, and from the close of December, when the pest commenced to decline, the knee with the right leg grew twice as large as the other, and of a dreadful colour. Nor could I consult doctors, for the visit of a doctor in that out-of-the-way place would not have cost less than fifteen ducats [the ducat nominally is 3s. 5½d.]. Thus this disease held me until the middle of February, when, through the excessive rigour of the season, although I scarcely ever went out of doors, I had a chest attack with fever, still without being able to consult anyone. The fever having passed of itself, I returned to town, where I took to bed at once, as convalescent, which I am, it may be said, still, not having been able from that day, because of the terrible season, to leave the house and regain some strength with open air and exercise. Nevertheless, the wholesomeness and warmth of the house keep me always improving; and the knee and limb, partly for the same reason, partly through the bed and the discharge of the humour through another channel, have so abated the swelling that I find myself almost cured of it.

'Meanwhile the communications with our State are not reopened, and within the last few days I have learned from the *Nunziatura* that there was no probability that they would be reopened yet awhile. And this is natural; for the cholera, besides that it is actually in vigour in several other parts of the kingdom, has never ceased even in Naples, there being every day, or almost every day, cases of it, which the

Government tries to conceal. Indeed in the last few days such cases appear to have multiplied, and very many doctors predict the return of the contagion in spring or summer; a return which to me also seems very natural, because the disease has not run its usual course, perhaps on account of the coldness of the season. This most uncomfortable impediment paralyses all my resolutions, and moreover puts me in the hard but most necessary necessity of keeping house here another year; a necessity of which one who has not been in Naples cannot easily be convinced. Here furnished lodgings rented by the month are not to be found, as everywhere else, because it is not the custom, except at enormous prices, and in families for the most part of thieves. I, the first month after my arrival, paid fifteen ducats, and the second twenty-two and because of my little box (*cassetta*) was attacked at night in my room by persons who certainly were those of the house. Unfurnished lodgings can only be rented by the year. . . . I only tell you these things in order that you may pity me a little for being in a country full of difficulties and of real and continual dangers, because really barbarous, much more so than can ever be believed by one who has not been here, or by those who have passed fifteen days or a month in it seeing the rarities.' On the 15th May he writes to Mme. Tommasini at Parma, telling her that the reprint of her excellent book on Domestic Education is at length published in Naples, after being delayed by the confusion caused by the cholera; that Ranieri's History, having reached the ninth part, has been sequestered at the instance of the priests, and the first volume of a romance by the same has been served in like fashion; and continuing: 'Giordani and yourself have at your command all the few and poor things of mine printed and not printed. But if I must choose, I ought to know of what kind is to be the collection which you say Giordani wants to publish. Of any of the three new pieces named in the notice prefixed to the second volume, which I have sent you, of my so-called works, Giordani may dispose at his pleasure, because that

edition also has been interdicted here by the priests, and cannot go on. If he should want unpublished things in verse, I could send him some likewise ; but if the censorship with you is scrupulous in theological matters, I am certain that nothing unpublished of mine can be printed there.' The same day he sends word to Mme. Maestri, at Parma, that her letter, which arrived at Naples on the 3rd April, did not reach him till the 11th May, when he got also two others, one more ancient than hers. He continues: 'I have learned with grief of your illness so long and painful. Truly this year has been and still is so pestiferous to human bodies, that I almost marvel that we are yet alive. . . . I do not write you with my own hand, because I must spare my right eye, threatened with an amaurosis [the "drop serene" of Milton]. Ranieri who writes kisses your hand.' And still on the same day to her husband, Ferdinand Maestri: 'To my innumerable misfortunes has been added in these last years a hand of Leopardi which has come forth with the most beastly writings in the world (*le più bestiali scritture del mondo*), the ignominy of which falls upon my unhappy name, for the public is neither capable nor careful to distinguish homonyms.' One can scarcely help believing that these strong expressions wickedly refer to the writings of his own father, in support of the Church and Legitimacy ; compare, however, passage quoted from letter to his father, 5th October, 1833.

We come now to the last of his letters in the *Epistolario*, dictated eighteen days before his death, on the 27th May, to his father: '*Mio carissimo papà* [the first as the last *dearest* to him], you will perhaps find it hard to believe, but your most welcome letter of the 21st March, marked here with the date of the 1st April, was sent me from the post on the 11th May, together with two others marked 3rd April. Having received it, I have been attacked for the first time in my life by a real and legitimate asthma which prevents me from walking, lying down, sleeping, and I am constrained to answer you by the hand of another because of my right eye threatened with amaurosis or cataract.'

After dwelling once more on the obstacles to his leaving Naples, in connection with his house and slender purse, he goes on: 'All these difficulties perhaps could be overcome finally. But the principal difficulty is that of the cholera, which recommenced here, as was foreseen, on the 13th April, and since then has continually increased, although the Government tries to conceal it. . . . If I escape the cholera, and directly my health will permit, I will do my utmost to see you again whatever the season; because I also am impatient for this, convinced now by experience of what I have always foreseen, that the limit prescribed by God to my life is not very far off. My physical sufferings daily and incurable are arrived with age [he was thirty-nine] at such a degree that they cannot increase any more; I hope that having vanquished finally the feeble resistance opposed to them by my moribund body, they will conduct me to the eternal rest, which I invoke earnestly every day, not through heroism, but through the rigour of the pangs I suffer.

'I thank affectionately yourself and mamma for the gift of ten scudi, kiss the hands of both, embrace my brothers and sister, and pray you all to commend me to God, in order that after I shall have seen you once more a good and prompt death may put an end to my physical evils, which cannot be otherwise cured. Your most loving son, GIACOMO.' These are his last words in the Correspondence.

The reader will have remarked in some of these extracts the strange terror of the cholera, then ravaging all the West of Europe, side by side with the fierce longing for death. Ranieri writes: 'It was in August, 1836, at the first and still remote announcement of the pest, that he repaired to his little house in the open country, from which he would not return to Capodimonte until February, 1837. Here were multiplied the symptoms of dropsy, as in the more open country were multiplied the symptoms of consumption. And as the pestilence, which in the winter seemed to have vanished altogether, reappeared much more fierce and horrible in the spring, were renewed in his gloomy

phantasy the terrors of a kind of death unknown and abominable, already unfortunately grafted in him by the celebrated German poet Platen, whom the same terrors had killed in Syracuse, long before the plague arrived there.' Brandes says that an intimate friendship had soon sprung up between these distinguished men, and that no day passed while they were in Naples without Count Platen visiting for an hour his sick friend. Ranieri goes on: 'All the consultations of the most grave and experienced doctors in the city, all the most vigorous and extreme remedies of science, were in vain. And on Wednesday, the 14th of June, at five in the evening, while a carriage was in waiting to remove him (last and desperate resource) to his country-house, and he was devising future rural excursions and vigils (*veglie*), the waters, which had long held the approaches to the heart, flooded fatally the pericardium, and the life smothered in its first source, that great man rendered smiling the noblest of spirits in the arms of a friend who loved and lamented him for ever.' This friend, I need hardly say, was Ranieri himself. One account says that he dictated the conclusion of the *Paralipomeni* two or three days before his death; another, that he completed *Il tramonto della luna* within a few hours of it. Ranieri says: 'His corpse, saved as if by miracle from the public and indiscriminate sepulture to which the stern law of that season condemned, whether plague-stricken or not, the greatest and meanest alike, was buried in the little suburban church of San Vitale on the road to Pozzuoli, in whose vestibule a stone makes modest and pious record of him.' Brandes says bluntly that Ranieri secured the corpse by bribing the police (*durch Bestechung der Polizei*); adding that it was buried in the grave of the parish priest of San Vitale, in the suburb of Fuorigrotta, near the burial-places of Virgil and Sannazaro. He also tells us that the last words of Leopardi were: I see here still less—open that window—let me see the light! (*Ci vedo più poco—apri quella finestra—fammi veder la luce!*); almost the same as those of Goethe, in which cheap philosophy has found noble intellectual suggestions, but which in

truth proclaim simply the anxious and childlike desire of the darkening bodily eyes for the homely and cheerful earthly light.

The tablet, which is about eight feet by four, bears the following inscription in Italian written by Giordani :—

TO THE COUNT GIACOMO LEOPARDI RECANATESE
 PHILOLOGIST ADMIRER BEYOND ITALY
 SUBLIME WRITER OF PHILOSOPHY AND POETRY
 TO BE COMPARED SOLELY WITH THE GREEKS
 WHO FINISHED AT XXXIX. YEARS HIS LIFE
 BY CONTINUAL DISEASES MOST WRETCHED
 DEDICATED ANTONIO RANIERI
 FOR VII. YEARS UNTIL THE LAST HOUR COMPANION
 TO THE FRIEND ADORED.

Above is the butterfly (psyche) with sprays of laurel and oak ; beneath the owl on the burning lamp enringed by the serpent of eternity.

Ranieri says : ‘ He was of middle height, bent and frail, complexion fair inclining to pallor, the head large, the forehead square and spacious, eyes blue and languid, nose thin and finely curved, lineaments exceedingly delicate, pronunciation modest and rather hoarse (*fioca*), his smile ineffable and as it were heavenly.’ The writer in the *Quarterly Review*, March, 1850*, says : ‘ A distinguished person who knew him well, and like all apparently, who so knew him, loved him well, during his latter years, assures us that he never saw Leopardi either laugh or smile.’ In the Florence edition of his works (Le Monnier) there is a portrait from a mask taken after death, bearing the impress of his immense sufferings. The widow of Baron Bunsen (vol. i. p. 228 of the Memoir) says : ‘ Those who remember the confiding benevolence expressed in Leopardi’s countenance, know also how devoid of all bitterness was his consciousness of wrong endured, how pure from the taint of personal hatred his denunciations of the evil without. . . . The

* Mr. Gladstone.—*Editor.*

spine complaint which distorted his body left the countenance so unmarked, save by the pressure of life-long pain, that the deformity cannot be supposed to have dated from the birth of one in whom the remarkable balance of faculties would presuppose an original justness of proportion, but must have resulted from an accident and from neglect in early infancy. . . Yet however high the merit of these publications may be, the man was of more value than any of the traces of his existence which he left behind. "Ese cuerpo, que con piadosos ojos estais rimirando, fué depositario de un alma en quien el cielo puso infinita parte de sus riquezas." (This body, which you are regarding with compassionate eyes, was the receptacle of a soul wherein heaven placed an infinite amount of its treasures.—*Don Quixote*, cap. xiii.) She also says that Bunsen intended to write a memoir of Leopardi, an intention which unfortunately was not fulfilled.

Brandes tells us that V. Gioberti, who in his principles was fundamentally opposed to Leopardi, renders this just tribute to his personal character: 'I knew him and have lived in intimate communion with him. I do not believe that a purer, nobler, more magnanimous soul ever traversed this earth.' Gioberti also, in his *Il Gesuita Moderno*, convicted Father Francesco Scarpa of falsehood in affirming the 'conversion' of Leopardi in the *Giornale di Scienza e Fede*. Yet when Leopardi's name has become familiar here, no doubt this pious fiction will be circulated among us by those who are always ready to lie for God as if he were a man to please him. Sainte-Beuve terms him 'the most noble, the most sober, the most austere of poets,' and says that he was a real ancient, of heroic Greece or free Rome. The following is the testimony of Niebuhr in the preface to his *Flavii Merobandis Carmina*, 2nd ed., 1823, as quoted and translated in the *Quarterly Review*: 'The very learned persons of whose admirable labours I make use are Bluhnius, now distinguished among legists, and Count Giacomo Leopardi of Recanati, whom I hereby introduce to my countrymen as already a conspicuous ornament of Italy, his

native land, and who, I answer for it, will rise progressively to still greater eminence; I, who am attached to the illustrious youth not more for his singular learning than for his remarkably ingenuous nature, shall rejoice in all his honours and advancements.' And the same reviewer quotes 'on the best authority' the following from the same great scholar in conversation with Bunsen: 'Conceive my astonishment when I saw standing before me, pale and shy, a mere youth, in a poor little chamber, of weakly figure, and obviously in bad health—he being by far the best—rather indeed the only Greek philologist in Italy, the author of *Critical Observations*, which would have gained honour for the first philologist of Germany, and only twenty-two years old [he was in his twenty-fifth year when Niebuhr saw him, but only twenty, I believe, when he wrote the annotations in question on Mai's *Chronicle of Eusebius*]. He had grown to be thus profoundly learned, without school, without teacher, without help, without encouragement, in his father's sequestered house! I understand, too, that he is one of the first of the rising poets of Italy. What a nobly gifted people!' As to his poems, it was Count Platen, I believe, who said that the grand Italian poetry, born on the lips of Dante, died at length on those of Leopardi. Brandes quotes from Arthur Schopenhauer's *Die Welt ab Wille und Vorstellung*, vol. ii. p. 673, 2nd ed., Leipzig, 1859, I presume from chap. xlv. (though I have not found the passage there in the 2nd ed., 1844), *On the Nothingness and Anguish of Life*: 'No one else has treated this subject so fundamentally and exhaustively as in our days Leopardi. He is wholly filled and pervaded with it: throughout he makes the mockery and woe of this existence his theme, on every page of his works he dwells upon it, yet with such multiplicity of forms and applications, with such wealth of imagery, that he is never tedious, but on the contrary is always interesting and affecting.'

Let the last word be to Ranieri, who has well merited it by his sublime devotion of friendship, and

whose appreciation is just, though his fashion of thought and expression is somewhat quaint and formal, as of a Southern Italian using unwieldy German terminology. He thus characterises the ultimate and dominant phase of Leopardi's intellectual development: 'As he had read suffering in all things, and chanted suffering everywhere, he interpreted all by suffering. Applying his prodigious intellect to the universe, he followed the same order that he had followed in applying to it his imagination (*fantasia*); and in his *Operette Morali* and in his *Comparazione di Bruto Minore e di Teofrasto*, he interpreted by suffering first the extrinsic intellectual world, then the intrinsic, and then the material world. Weary at last of a pilgrimage so grievous and interminable, and rendered almost insensible to their stings, he reposed on the very thorns of his suffering, and having dissolved the three sciences with which he had probed the universe, as in a vast sleeping potion, he drank thereof in deep draughts oblivion of all beings and of himself. Ultimately, this fierce potion digested, he awoke; and from the potent assimilation was enabled to smile, now disdainfully, now sadly, now bitterly at all things. The *Pensieri* and the *Paralipomeni* are the manifestations of this triple and appalling smile." Then as to his writings: 'Such was the genius of Leopardi, and such its history, regarded in its essence (*costanza*), or if you will, in its intrinsic form. The extrinsic form in which it was manifested to his fellow-men was the most beautiful ever assumed by the most beautiful of spoken languages. He wrote Greek, Latin, and antique Italian that would deceive an ancient. . . . But the genuine and spontaneous form in which that prodigious intellect manifested itself, and in which we should really study it, was the Italian of the present. In this he solved the old problem of saying everything purely and powerfully; and showed that the great writer ought to be and can be rightful sovereign and not oppressed subject of language. Never did any idiom obey more spontaneously any man than our language obeyed this inimitable writer.

Strong and daring in the first indignation aroused in him by that dolour which he felt palpitate no less in his own life than in universal being [compare Rom. viii. 22, 23]; fierce and terrible in the desperation that ensued; grave and ineffably simple in the lethargy of weary resignation that ultimately possessed him; his style represented at once the variety, the unity, and the perfection of the universe, expressed all in all modes in which it could be expressed, and was a grand and striking proof that human language is, if the phrase be allowed, the synthesis of the world, and is only arrested by the limits that separate the world from the infinite. In addition to causes so powerful, the enchantment wrought by his style, whether in verse or prose, consisted in the perfection of the propriety and of the order of the words. He derived art from the sixteenth century (*cinquecento*), simplicity from the fourteenth (*trecento*), and the peculiar correctness of his style, first from the Greeks, the supreme models of perfection, and secondly from his age and from himself, whence a man should derive before all. And notwithstanding his boundless studies, he was wont to say that a writer taking pen in hand should forget as much as possible that there are books and learning in the world, and should manifest the pure and spontaneous conceptions of his own mind. He thought excellent prose much more difficult than excellent verse, remarking that the latter resembles a lady richly dressed, the former a woman naked. And profoundly conscious of his power to accomplish everything in writing, he seemed as it were to amuse himself with the most difficult difficulties of Italian prose.'

The following passages, one from the beginning, the other from the end of Ranieri's Notice, are closely related, as extremes usually are: 'Since the universe is a lively representation of an infinite intelligence and power, and man who lives in it is a lively representation of the universe, he is deputed to represent it first by thought strictly so termed, that is by language; then by thought incarnate, that is by

action. The greater or less imperfection both of the two parts constituting this representation and of their reciprocal correspondence makes the ordinary or the great man. Unhappily it is sometimes the lot of man to be born in countries or in times so fatal to his species, that his thought cannot find either opportunity or possibility to incarnate and manifest itself in the shape of action. Then all the human genius concentrates itself in thought strictly so termed, that is in language; and when this genius is powerful appears that halved kind of great man called a great writer. Thus, as the life of a great man in general is composed of the history of his thoughts and actions, that of a great writer in particular is composed of the history of his thoughts only. And therefore my short notice of the great writer Giacomo Leopardi cannot recount travels and wars, and other matters strange and tumultuous, but simply the mode in which the universe successively appeared to him and he successively manifested it.

Thus contemplated the universe, thus lived and thus died Giacomo Leopardi, one of the greatest writers, and (had it been his lot to be born elsewhere) one of the greatest men that have emerged in these latter times, not only in Italy but in Europe. Great by marvellous and almost superhuman genius, great by boundless and almost incredible learning and by prose and poetry sublime and inimitable, he was greatest and probably (*facilmente*) unique by the modesty and innocence of his life. This man, worthy in all things of a better age, carried intact to the tomb the flower of his virginity; and this because he loved twice (although without hope) as never any man had loved upon earth. Just, humane, liberal, magnanimous, and most loyal, he imagined at first that mankind were altogether good. Betrayed and disabused of his excessive expectations, he concluded at length that they were altogether evil. And only his premature death hindered him from reaching that third and settled disposition of mind by which he would have estimated men as they really are, neither

altogether good nor altogether bad. The very extremes, apparently inexplicable, to which he went in his practical daily life, as in taking too much or too little of food, light, air, exercise, social conversation, and the like, were indeed the most vivid and true testimony of his innate and angelic goodness ; for he thus *tried* hostile nature by the most contrary means, to see whether he could obtain from her entrance into the great harmony and universal love of all the creation,* from which the tremendous fascination (*prestigio*) of his immense suffering had made him believe himself fatally excluded. That neither the suffering nor the fascination was curable will surprise those only who, in judging great men, regard neither the times, the places, nor the temperaments, and cannot imagine (*presupporre*) what would have been Alexander, or Cæsar, or Napoleon, if born in the conditions of Leopardi.'

PARALLEL BETWEEN PASCAL AND LEOPARDI*

LEOPARDI has been termed, not without reason, the PASCAL of Italy, but is more virile or less feminine, although supremely a poet, than the PASCAL of France; as indeed the greatest Italians have been thoroughly men, while not a few of the greatest French have had much of the woman or the child. By the grandeur of their genius and the enduring intensity of their sufferings these two are perhaps the most remarkable victims in our modern literature of that tragedy in which Nature seems to delight, the tragedy of a powerful and energetic spirit in an imbecile body. Chatterton and Keats suffered bitterly, but not for long; Marlowe fell in lusty youth; Shelley's pains and sorrows were drowned before he could reach his prime, and moreover he had lived and loved; Alfred de Musset was prematurely outworn, but at least he was 'a young man with a fine past'; Novalis faded away early after his ideal beloved, and he was gentle and pietistic and about to marry another; Heine lay for seven years tortured and helpless on his 'mattress-grave,' but not until he had freely enjoyed a youth and manhood of the richest life: for Pascal and Leopardi there was scarcely any life of true childhood, no life at all of swift youth and strong manhood; only a miserable death-in-life of disease and weakness, languor and hypochondria, infinite weariness; the potent spirit overcome and disabled by the impotent flesh, each

* This parallel was apparently intended to form part of Thomson's critical essay on the works of Leopardi. No more of this essay was ever written; and indeed I have had to piece together as best I could from Thomson's papers what is here printed.—*Editor*.

ravaging and destroying the other ; and this hopeless agony prolonged to the verge of the fortieth year. It may be true that regarded from above, regarded by a god if god there were to regard them, all our lives would appear about equally tragic ; but regarded from our human level the inequalities are manifold and vast ; Osric and Hamlet, Cloten and Imogen, a good British Philistine and Shelley, scarcely appear to us of the same species ; we find their natures and their dooms alike incommensurable. In Schiller's *Siegessfest* the Greek songs of triumph are pierced by wailings, not only from the Trojan women captives, but also from the conquerors themselves :---

Ohne Wahl vertheilt die Gaben,
Ohne Billigkeit das Glück ;
Denn Patroklos liegt begraben,
Und Thersites kommt Zurück !

And to our human regard there are few tragedies at once so sublime and so heartrending as this of an imperial intellect and imperious will agonising and starving to death through exhaustion of the subject body. Many lives are most sad to contemplate because those who live them are unconscious or even exultant while degenerating to ignominious ruin ; many are rather apt to excite scorn and aversion than pity or terror, because of the intrinsic weakness and corruption coefficient with destiny to their ruin (though the weakness and corruption are also of destiny) ; but in this tragedy the 'actor-victims' are lofty and unsullied throughout ; their weakness and anguish, their defeat and ruin, are due to the excessive predominance of the nobler over the ignobler faculties ; and our sympathy is deepened by the perception that they are martyrs for our general cause, that their loss is our loss, their defeat our defeat, that they are worn and wasted by extreme striving for our good, that immense spiritual services to the race are baffled by the disease destroying them ; and it galls us to think of the millions and myriads worthless or of slightest worth who enjoy in common with bull and drayhorse

that robust physical health which is alone wanting to those most worthy. Fretful with a grievous disappointment, we are tempted to accuse great Nature (whose deference to our opinions is remarkably encouraging) of malign mockery or stupidity in elaborating those rare and supreme things, a mighty brain and a noble heart, and then stinting them in the cheap and common nutriment of flesh and blood. She grudges the wood of the casket in bestowing a priceless jewel. She forges a blade of finest temper, then leaves it to rust in a broken sheath, while the world's brawl and battle must be fought out with flails and pitchforks. 'Even piety herself at so shameful a sight cannot refrain from all upbraidings against the permitting stars.'

In both Pascal and Leopardi the frail body ravaged by the mighty intellect conserved a miserable life or death-in-life until the age of thirty-nine years. Both as mere boys and youths, self-taught and self-inspired, accomplished (the former in mathematics pure and applied; the latter in philology and the science of criticism) what would have crowned with glory the healthy life of a genius, wholly dedicated to one particular subject. Thus marvellously mature in their very childhood, both renounced their first studies when entering upon manhood. Both by their writings of general interest, written in brief intermissions of agony and the languor born of agony (Pascal by his *Provincial Letters*, and specially by his *Thoughts*; Leopardi by his *Poems*, his *Moral Essays*, and his *Thoughts*), so far transcended the glory which can be reaped in any one department of science, that we really count it for little in the appraisal of Pascal's intellect that in mathematical genius he was without a superior, in the appraisal of Leopardi's that he was unsurpassed in the genius philological.

At twelve years of age Pascal, untaught, was found demonstrating the thirty-second proposition of Euclid's first book; at sixteen he wrote his treatise on conic sections; at eighteen he invented his arithmetical

machine ; at twenty-three he made his famous experiments on vacuums and the gravity of the air ; after this age he never again applied himself to mathematical science, the theory of the curve termed 'roulette' being casually and, so to say, passively wrought out in his head, and written out offhand in eight days. From the age of eighteen he never passed a day without suffering. From twenty-four, and more thoroughly from thirty-one, he gave himself wholly to religious life and study. From thirty-five till his death he existed in a state of continual languor which could not be called life ; yet during these very years he noted down the thoughts, which were but scattered materials, some rough, some finely wrought, for his great projected work on Christianity.

Leopardi from thirteen to seventeen was plunging profoundly into recondite erudition, writing six or seven volumes, not small, on the subjects of his studies ; took to the *lettere belle* before eighteen ; turned his mind seriously to poetry and philosophy from his twenty-first year ; and, like Pascal, never had a day without suffering, from his adolescence. The letter to his friends prefixed to the Florence edition of his poems describes the agony and languor which had disabled him years before he was thirty-two ; and the rest of his life was but as the last four years of Pascal's. Yet in this maturity of long death in life he wrote most of his poems and the *Moral Essays*.

The nature of the malady common to both made the intellect supernaturally clear, subtle, and sensitive, though for long intervals incapable of working owing to the exhaustion of its proper organ. Both have the perfection of Greek grace in their work ; for both not only had supreme gifts from nature, but the infinite conscientious patience of the great artist ; what is written of the former being equally true of the latter : 'he was accustomed so to elaborate all his works that he scarcely ever contented himself with his first thoughts, however good those seemed to others ; and he re-wrote again and again, even to eight or ten times, pieces which anyone else would have considered admir-

able as first written.' So the best sentences in Pascal's *Thoughts* are probably the finest for simple and noble beauty in the whole range of French literature ; and the best in Leopardi's *Moral Essays* (which are his equivalent for Pascal's *Thoughts*, his own *Thoughts* moving principally in a lower plane) can hardly be paralleled in Italian save by the noblest in Dante's *Vita Nuova*. The style of Leopardi is generally more elaborate in its structure than that of Pascal ; but this is probably due as much to the difference of the languages as of the men. And the superiority of the former in that he was a poet may be also in part due to the superiority of his language. French, which is delightful in chansons and the verse of comedy, can at loftiest be only impressively eloquent when trying to give metrical expression to that which is most solemn, beautiful, and sublime. At least we English find it so ; and as we can appreciate the grandeur of the eminent poets of the kindred Latin idioms, we have strong presumption that the failure in French is the fault of the language and not of us, the readers. I therefore judge that the instinct of high genius made Pascal keep to prose ; just as the same instinct made Leopardi give some of his loftiest moments to verse, for Italian metre is one of the grandest organs ever built up by man.

The most conspicuous coincidence between the two men is the preternatural clearness (suffering making them sensitive to a degree unimaginable by ordinary robust men) with which they saw the nature of man in all its strength and weakness and marvellous inconsistencies ; saw and felt the evil destiny of man in its naked and terrible truth ; all the more mysterious for its nakedness. From this central point of coincidence (for the most pregnant law of identical contraries summed up in the proverb that extremes meet, is equally true in its converse that meeting is widest separation) the two men diverge in opposite directions. Pascal more feminine in soul, in despite of his virile and lucid intellect, becomes a saint ; studying the Bible, so that he knows it by heart, and in this study renouncing

all the light of his intelligence; hating and torturing himself with heroic monomania in order to become a perfect Christian. Leopardi more masculine in soul, with an equally virile and lucid intellect, becomes a stoical pessimist; steadfastly gazing on the dreadful truth, recognising it in its nakedness, refusing all the fond consolations of religions and other dreams. I will say nothing in depreciation of religion as it was felt and lived up to by him. His faith, which made him torture himself and refuse himself to family love, repelling and wounding the fond hearts which yearned with tenderness towards him, gave him some raptures of meditation, and perhaps intensified his natural purity and charity: it was not responsible for his long maturity of misery. Both Leopardi and Pascal were wretched; the sublime infidel equally with the sublime Christian. When life in the flesh is a long agony, life is miserable; in whatever creed or system it may clothe itself. But the religion of Pascal is responsible for the degradation of the philosopher as a philosopher; for making the man, whose intelligence was naturally so pure and veracious, attempt tricks of legerdemain with an intricate shuffling of texts; for making the austere and sincere thinker abase himself to conscious paradox and sophistry, and to the moods of a courtesan, scolding, weeping, wheedling, imploring, to convert others to a faith which his own lucid logic would not suffer him to establish to his own contentment. We cannot but blush with shame for the man one reveres as for one's own unworthiness, when reading the later articles of the *Pensées*. The tragedy of Pascal's life is all noble; the tragedy of his spiritual life as developed in this masterpiece of fragments is not all noble.

STORY OF THE HUMAN RACE

It is said that all men who in the beginning peopled the earth were created everywhere at the same time, and all infants, and were nourished by bees, goats, and doves, in the manner that the poets fabled of the rearing of *Jove* : and that the earth was much smaller than it is now, nearly all the regions level, the sky without stars, the sea not yet formed ; and that there appeared in the world much less variety and magnificence than it now possesses. But nevertheless mankind, taking inexhaustible delight in regarding and considering heaven and earth, wondering at them beyond measure, and accounting the one and the other most beautiful, and not merely vast, but infinite in extent as in majesty and loveliness ; nourishing themselves, moreover, with the most joyous hopes, and drawing from every sensation of their life incredible pleasures, grew up with much content, and believed themselves to be almost completely happy. Having thus fulfilled very sweetly childhood and early adolescence, and reached maturer age, they began to experience some change. For the hopes, whose fruition until then they had gone on putting off from day to day, not being realised, they began to lose faith in them ; and to content themselves with what they actually enjoyed, without the prospect of any increase of good, seemed to be against their nature, particularly as the aspect of natural things and every part of their daily life, whether by long usage or because the first vivacity of their minds was diminished, became much less delightful and grateful than in the beginning. They wandered about the earth visiting the most remote regions, since they could easily do so, the districts being level, and not divided by seas, nor obstructed by other difficulties ; and after some years most of them perceived that the earth, although great, was not so vast as to be without well-defined limits ; and that all the parts of it, and all its inhabitants, with but slight differences, were similar one to

another. Wherefore their discontent so increased, that they had not yet outgrown their youth, when a distaste for their own being became universal amongst them. And step by step in their maturity and yet more in their declining years, satiety being converted into hatred, some of them arrived at such desperation that not enduring the light and the life, which they had at first loved so much, they spontaneously, some in one mode and some in another, ended their existence.

It seemed dreadful to the gods that living creatures should prefer death to life, and destroy themselves without being compelled by any unavoidable circumstance or extreme necessity. It cannot be told how much they marvelled that their gifts should be accounted so vile and abominable that men should with all their force renounce and reject them; since they believed they had put in the world so much good and beauty, and such regulations and conditions that this dwelling-place ought to be not only endured but loved by all animals whatsoever, and most of all by men whose race they had formed with singular care and wonderful excellence. But at the same time, besides being touched with no little pity for the human misery which was so sadly manifested, they even doubted whether, those grievous examples being renewed and multiplied, the human species in a short while, in spite of destiny, would not wholly perish, and the world be deprived of that perfection which accrued to it from our race, and themselves of those honours they received from mankind.

Jove therefore resolved to improve, as improvement seemed needful, the conditions of human life, and to provide it with additional means for attaining felicity. Men chiefly complained, he found, that things were not immense in greatness, nor infinite in beauty, perfection, and variety, as they had deemed at first; but were indeed very limited, all imperfect, and nearly uniform; and that, complaining not only of their age, but of their maturity, and even of their youth, and desiring the delights of their earliest years, men ardently prayed to be reconverted to childhood, and in that condition to

remain all their lives. In which Jove could not satisfy them, it being contrary to the universal laws of nature, and to those functions and uses which mankind ought, according to the divine intention and decrees, to exercise and fulfil. Nor could he communicate his own infinity to mortal creatures, nor make matter infinite, nor infinite the perfection and felicity of things and men. However, he thought it expedient to extend the limits of the creation, and to further adorn and vary it; and having thus resolved, he enlarged the earth on every side, and poured into it the sea, with the object of diversifying the world's appearance by its interposition between the various inhabited regions, and of preventing men, by the difficulties of navigation, from too easily discovering its limits, while giving to the eye at the same time a vivid impression of immensity. At which period the new waters occupied the land of Atlantis, and not only it, but also other innumerable and very extensive tracts, although of that only the memory remains, preserved through countless ages in story and legend. Many districts he depressed, many filled up by raising mountains and hills, sprinkled the night with stars, refined and purified the nature of the air, increased the clearness and light of the day, heightened and proportioned more diversely the colours of the heavens and the landscapes; and mixed the generations of mankind so that the old age of some fell in the same time as the youth and childhood of others. And having determined to multiply the appearances of that infinitude which men so ardently desired (since he could not gratify them with the reality), and wishing to cherish and nourish their imaginations, from which, he well knew, chiefly arose the great happiness of their childhood, he adopted many other expedients similar to that of the seas; such as the creation of Echo, which he concealed in valleys and caverns. He filled the forests with the deep and hollow voices of the winds, whose motions at the same time caused a continual undulation of the tree-tops. He created likewise the brood of dreams, and charged them that, illuding under many forms the minds of men, they

should figure to them that plenitude of unintelligible felicity, which even he could not create, and those confused and indeterminate imaginings, which, being without any substantial prototypes, could not be realised, however much men might yearn for them, and however willing Jove might otherwise be to gratify their longings.

By these provisions of Jove the spirit of man was refreshed and renovated, and the charm and sweetness of life were in everyone restored, so that they once more felt, loved, and admired the beauty and immensity of earthly things. And this good state lasted longer than the first, chiefly because of the intervals between the times of birth which Jove had introduced, so that those whom experience of life had chilled and wearied were refreshed by the sight of the warmth and hopefulness of the young. But in process of time, the novelty being quite gone, the tedium and disesteem of life returned stronger than before, and men sank into such dejection that it is believed the custom then began which is recorded in histories as practised by certain ancient peoples*, namely, that when a child was born the parents and friends of the family assembled to mourn over the event; but when a death occurred the day was consecrated to rejoicings and congratulatory discourses. At last all mortals became infected with impiety, either because they believed themselves to be abandoned by Jove, or because it is the very nature of misery to harden and corrupt even the dispositions most inclined to goodness. For they are altogether wrong who think that human infelicity was first born from the iniquities of men and their offences against the gods. On the contrary, the ill-conduct of men first arose from nothing else but their calamities.

After the gods had punished the insolence of mortals with the deluge of Deucalion, and taken vengeance for their outrages, the two survivors of the universal destruction of our species, Deucalion and Pyrrha, con-

* See Herodotus, lib. 5, cap. 4; Strabo, lib. 11, edit. Casaubon, pag. 519; Mela, lib. 2, cap. 2, etc.

vinced that nothing more fortunate for the human race could happen than that it should be wholly extinguished, seated themselves upon the summit of a cliff, and vehemently called upon death to release them from the burden of existence—so far were they from fearing or deploring the common lot. Nevertheless, admonished by Jove once more to people the earth, and not enduring, in consequence of their wretchedness and their disdain of life, the work of generation, they took stones from the mountain, as the gods instructed them, and casting these over their shoulders restored the human species. But Jove had become aware by what had passed of the true nature of men; and that it does not suffice them, like other animals, merely to live exempt from pain and physical suffering; but that, desiring always and in whatever condition the impossible, they torment themselves the more with imaginary evils the less they are afflicted with real ones. He therefore resolved to avail himself of other arts to conserve this miserable race; the chief of which were these two. The one was to inflict upon them real evils; the other to involve their lives in a thousand businesses and labours, so as to occupy them and divert them as much as possible from communion with their own minds, or at least from desiring that unknown and impossible felicity. Wherefore he began by diffusing among them a multitude of diseases and an infinite number of other misfortunes, in which his intention was, by varying the conditions and fortunes of human life, to prevent satiety by leading men to appreciate more highly their real blessings owing to the contrast between them and the evils from which they were now to suffer; and moreover to so accustom their minds to wretchedness that the lack of positive pleasure in life, which they had hitherto found so hard to support, might now become much more tolerable to them. It was also his intention to break and tame the ferocity of mankind by compelling them to bow the neck and yield to necessity, thus inducing them to be more content with their lot, and curbing the vehemence of their desires no less by physical infirmities

than by mental sufferings. And moreover he knew that it must come to pass that men oppressed by diseases and calamities would be less ready than heretofore to turn their hands against themselves, because they would be cowed and prostrated in spirit, as results from the habitude of suffering. For those who suffer are usually sanguine of an improvement in their condition, and therefore desire to live, believing that they would be altogether happy could they overcome the evils which afflict them : and this they always hope to do since their nature so persuades them.

Then Jove created the tempests of wind and rain, armed himself with thunder and lightning, gave to Neptune the trident, put the comets in revolution, and ordained the eclipses ; with these things and with other terrible signs and effects meaning to terrify mortals from time to time, knowing that fear and present dangers would reconcile to life, at least for short periods, not only the unhappy, but those even who most detested it, and were most inclined to flee from it.

Then, in order to cure the former indolence of men, he induced in them the need and the appetite for new kinds of food and drink, which could not be procured without much and heavy toil ; whereas before the deluge men quenched their thirst with water only, and fed on the herbs and fruits which the earth and the trees ministered to them spontaneously, and on other simple aliments, such as even now some uncivilised peoples live upon, and particularly the inhabitants of California. He assigned to the different regions of the earth different climatic conditions, and divided the year into the four seasons. And whereas, up to that period, the earth's temperature had at all times been so uniformly benign and pleasant that men had never felt the need of clothing, they were now compelled to provide themselves with it, in order that they might thus at the cost of much labour counteract the mutations and the inclemency of the weather.

* He entrusted to Mercury the task of founding the first cities, and of introducing rivalries and discords

among men by dividing them into peoples and nations, and by giving them different languages. Jove instructed him also to teach men song and those other arts, which both on account of their nature and origin were and still are called divine. He himself gave laws, conditions, and civil ordinances to the new peoples; and finally, wishing to bless them with an incomparable gift, he sent among them certain phantasms of most excellent and superhuman aspect, to whom he delegated to a great extent the government and guidance of our race. These were called Justice, Virtue, Glory, Patriotism, and the like. Among them was one named Love, who like the rest, then first came upon earth; for before clothing came into use the sexes had been drawn towards each other, not by the sentiment of love, but by that impetus of desire which has at all times governed the brutes; and which, like the desire for food, depends upon appetite alone, and not upon any higher feeling.

It was wonderful how much fruit these divine decrees bore for human life, and how much the new condition of men, notwithstanding the toils, the terrors, and the sufferings—things before then unknown to our race—surpassed in comfort and sweetness that which had existed before the deluge. And this result proceeded in great part from those wonderful phantasms, which men accounted now genii, now gods, and followed and worshipped with incredible fervour, and with vast and astonishing labours for a very long period; being chiefly excited thereto by their most celebrated poets and artists, at whose instigation many mortals did not hesitate to sacrifice their blood or their lives to these imaginary beings, now to one of them and now to another. And this, far from offending Jove, pleased him beyond measure, because, among other reasons, he judged that men must be so much the less willing to throw life away voluntarily as they were the more ready to spend it for noble and glorious causes. These good ordinances greatly exceeded in effect and duration the precedent ones; since, although their efficacy gradually declined and at last altogether disappeared,

their influence lasted so long that down to a period not far distant from the present age, human life, almost entirely happy at first, remained for many ages easy enough or at least endurable.

The decline of this comparatively happy condition of mankind was due to various causes; among which may be mentioned the many inventions which men discovered to provide easily and quickly for their needs; the great increase in the disparity of conditions and functions instituted among them by Jove when he founded the first republics; the indolence and vanity that through these causes, after a long exile, again became prevalent; the fact that, partly owing to the nature of things, and partly because of the indifference induced by familiarity, men were no longer sensible of the variety in life which Jove had established, a result which always happens after long habitude; and lastly to other grave causes, which, as they have been described and expounded by other writers, I will not now dwell upon. Certain it is that men again felt that disgust with their lot which had afflicted them before the deluge, and that they longed once more for that impossible felicity which is alike unknown and alien to the nature of the universe.

But the total revolution of their fortune and the end of that state which we are now wont to call antique, arose chiefly from a cause different from those already mentioned: and it was this: Among those phantasms so much esteemed by the ancients was one called in their tongues Wisdom; which, being honoured universally like all its companions, and being followed in particular by many, had no less than the others contributed its share to the prosperity of the past ages. This phantasm many and many times, indeed daily, had promised and vowed to its followers that it would show them Truth, which it said was a very great genius and its own master, never yet seen upon the earth, but dwelling with the gods in heaven; whence Wisdom promised that by its own authority and favour it should be brought down to earth, and induced for some time to reside among men. By commerce

and familiarity with this Truth the human race would gain such profundity of knowledge, so excellent a system of government, such good manners, and such a degree of happiness that its condition would almost compare with that of the gods. But how could a mere shadow and empty semblance realise its promises, much more bring Truth to earth? So that men after very long believing and trusting grew aware of the vanity of these promises; yet being always avid for new things, especially through the indolence in which they lived; and stimulated partly by the ambition to rival the gods, and partly by the desire of that beatitude which the phantasm had promised them would be obtained by conversation with Truth, they demanded from Jove, with as much importunity as presumption, that he should, for some time at least, allow this most noble of spirits to take up its residence on earth; at the same time upbraiding the deity for envying them the benefits which they would derive from its presence, and renewing their ancient and odious lamentations of the littleness and poverty of their condition. And because these specious phantasms, the source of so much benefit to the preceding ages, were now held by the majority in small esteem; not that men had yet discovered their illusory character, but because the general baseness of thought and looseness of manners was such that hardly anyone was now influenced by them; they, blaspheming the greatest boon which the Immortals had made or could make to them, cried out that the earth was only thought worthy of the presence of the inferior genii; while the greater, to whose authority men would willingly bow, were not allowed or permitted to visit this despised portion of the universe.

Many things had already for a long time alienated the goodwill of Jove from men; and among others the unparalleled vices and misdeeds, which for number and enormity had left far behind the wickedness which had been punished by the deluge. He was thoroughly disgusted, after so many trials, with the restless, insatiable, immoderate human nature, which he now

saw that nothing could render tranquil, not to say happy ; since no provisions for its welfare contented it, no condition pleased it, and no country satisfied it. Even though he had been willing to augment a thousandfold the dimensions and pleasures of the world and the universe, mankind, always desirous, although incapable, of infinity, would quickly find these new conditions narrow, unlovely, and of little value. But at last these foolish and haughty demands so stirred the wrath of Jove that he determined, putting aside all pity, to punish for ever the human race, condemning it for all time to miseries much graver than those of the past. To which end he not only resolved to send Truth to stay among men for some time as they asked, but to give it eternal domicile among them, making it their perpetual director and lord : and at the same time withdrawing from earth those gracious phantasms which he had placed there.

The other gods were astonished at this decision, which, it seemed to them, was likely to lead to the undue exaltation of our condition and the prejudice of their superiority. But Jove caused them to change their opinion by proving to them that not all the genii, even the great, are essentially beneficent, and that such is not the character of Truth, and that it would not produce the same results among men as among themselves. For whereas it made manifest to the immortals their own beatitude, it would, on the contrary, discover to men and place more clearly before their eyes their own infelicity ; proving to them, moreover, that their condition was no incidental or accidental circumstance, but was due to the very nature of things, and was such as they could by no means remedy or escape from. And most human evils being of such a nature that they are evil in the proportion that they are believed to be so by those who suffer from them, and more or less grave according to their opinion of them, it was easy to judge how harmful the presence of Truth amongst men must be ; since by its means nothing will appear more profoundly true than the falsity of all human blessings, and they will realise the vanity of every-

thing except their own suffering. For these reasons they will be even bereft of hope, with which from the beginning until now, more than with any other joy or comfort whatever, they have supported life. And hoping nothing, nor seeing any worthy object to strive or labour for, they will fall into such a state of indifference and abhorrence towards all worthy and elevated aims that the condition of the living will differ but little from that of the dead. But in this condition of despair and inactivity they will be still tormented by that desire for boundless felicity which is inseparable from their nature, and which will sting and torment them more than ever because it will no longer be mitigated or distracted by a variety of cares or of active employments. At the same time they will be deprived of the solace derived from imagination, which alone was able in some degree to satisfy their cravings after that impossible and incomprehensible felicity which is unattainable either by gods or men, however much they may yearn for it. And (continued Jove) all those semblances of infinity which I have placed in the world to illude and nourish them, according to their desires, with vague and shadowy aspirations will become ineffective, because of the new ideas and new methods of thinking which Truth will teach them. So that if the earth and the universe have heretofore seemed small to men, they will now appear quite insignificant, since the arcana of nature will be opened and revealed to them; and these, contrary to their present expectations, will seem so much the narrower in proportion as their knowledge of them becomes greater. Finally, its phantasms having been withdrawn from the earth through the teachings of Truth, by which men will gain full acquaintance with the nature of them, all valour and rectitude of thought and of deed will die out of human life, and men will no longer pride themselves on their love of their country, but will again, as at the beginning, account themselves citizens of the world, making professions of universal love towards all their species, though in reality the race will consist no longer of communities, but of individuals; and these, having

no native country to be specially loved and no foreign one to hate, everyone will hate everybody else and love himself alone. From which condition of things, how many and how great troubles will surely spring it would be infinite to recount. Yet in spite of all their infelicities men will not have courage enough to end their existence, because the influence of Truth will render them not less despicable than miserable; and adding beyond measure to the bitterness of life will take from them the will to renounce it.

Jove having thus declared his intentions, it appeared to the gods that our fate would be much more cruel and terrible than it was consonant with the divine mercy to permit. But Jove went on to say that he was disposed, while removing all the other phantasms, to leave them the one called Love, from which they would derive some slight comfort. And it would not be allowed to Truth, although most powerful and continually opposing it, to drive Love from the earth, or to vanquish it, save rarely. Thus the life of man, equally occupied in the worship of Love and of Truth, will be divided into two parts, and the phantasm and the genii will share between them the empire over the affairs and thoughts of mortals. Most men will be solicitous about these alone, save some few things of very minor importance. In old age the want of the consolations of love will be compensated by a kind of passive contentment with existence, such as is seen in the lower animals, and men will cherish life for its own sake merely, and not because of any joy or comfort which they derive from it.

Thus having withdrawn from earth the blessed phantasms, saving only Love, the least noble of all, Jove sent among men Truth, and gave it with them perpetual residence and lordship. Whence followed all those lamentable effects which he had foreseen. And one very marvellous thing resulted: that whereas Truth before its arrival on earth, when it had no power or commerce with men, had been honoured by them with a very great number of temples and sacrifices; now that it was come upon earth with royal authority,

and began to be known face to face, it so afflicted the minds of men and smote them with such horror that they, although forced to obey it, altogether refused to adore it, contrary to the case of all other celestial beings, which are the more venerated the more they are known. And while the phantasms of Justice, Glory, Virtue, and Patriotism were wont to be most loved and honoured by those over whom their influence was greatest, this genius excited the fiercest maledictions and the deepest hatred from those over whom it exercised the greatest power. But not being able to evade or resist its tyranny, mortals lived in that supreme misery which they endure now, and always must endure.

However, that pity, which in the minds of celestials is never extinguished, moved Jove not long since to take again into consideration the unhappy state of mankind, more especially because he saw that those among them who were most remarkable for their high intelligence, their noble sentiments, and their integrity of conduct were, above all others, afflicted by the power and hard domination of Truth. It was the custom of the gods in the ancient days, when Justice, Virtue, and the other phantasms governed human affairs, to visit sometimes their dominions, now one and now another, descending to earth and manifesting their presence in various ways, their visits always bringing some great benefit either to all mortals or to some one in particular. But when life had once more become corrupted and sunk in every kind of wickedness, they disdained for a very long time to hold any intercourse with men. At last, Jove, compassionating our extreme infelicity, asked the gods whether any of them were disposed to visit mankind, as they had formerly been accustomed to do, to comfort them in their misery, and especially those among them who showed themselves deserving of a better fate. Whereon, all the others keeping silent, Love, the son of the Celestial Venus, like in name to the phantasm thus called, but in nature, virtue, and actions most unlike, moved by that spirit of compassion which distinguishes

him above all the gods, offered himself to undertake the mission proposed by Jove, and to descend from heaven, whence never before had he withdrawn himself, since he was so ineffably dear to the gods that they had never before allowed him to depart from their society even for an instant. It is true, indeed, that many of the ancients, deceived by the transformations and divers frauds of the phantasm called by the same name, believed themselves to have received from time to time tokens of the presence of the great god amongst them; but it is certain that he never visited mortals before they were subjected to the domination of Truth. And since that time he has only very rarely descended to earth, and for brief periods; partly because of the general unworthiness of the human race, and partly because the gods could hardly endure his absence. When he does visit the earth he takes up his abode in the amiable and tender hearts of generous and magnanimous persons, and diffuses therein, for the short period he remains, a strange and wonderful serenity, and fills them with affections so noble, and of such virtue and force, that they experience a sensation hitherto unknown to them, namely, a feeling of real beatitude, and not a mere illusive semblance of it. Sometimes, though all too rarely, he unites two such hearts, which he binds together by inducing in them a reciprocal ardour and desire. This happy condition is often fervently prayed for by those who have once been favoured by the god; but Jove seldom permits him to gratify their desires, because the felicity arising from such a blessing resembles too nearly that of the deities themselves. But merely to experience in one's self the presence of this divinity is a happiness such as transcends all others that have ever been known to mankind. Where Love is, around him, although seen only by those whom he favours, are congregated those beautiful phantasms which Jove banished from earth, but which Love brings back again. For this he has Jove's permission; nor can Truth, though most hostile to these phantasms, and greatly resenting their reappearance, resist their influence,

for the genii may not dispute the will of the gods. And inasmuch as the fates endowed Love with eternal youth, so in consonance with his nature he fulfils in some degree that first desire of men, which was that they might have their youth restored to them. For in the minds which he elects to inhabit he revives and makes green again, whilst he remains there, the infinite hope and the beautiful and dear imaginations of their tender years. Many mortals, ignorant of and incapable of his delights, continually mock and slander him with unbridled audacity; but he is deaf to their insults, and if he heard would not punish them, being by nature so mild and magnanimous. And, moreover, the immortals, satisfied with the vengeance they have taken on all our species, and the incurable misery which afflicts it, heed not the particular offences of man; nor are the fraudulent and the unjust and the contemnners of the gods otherwise specially punished than by being, even by their very nature, alienated from the divine grace.

DIALOGUE BETWEEN HERCULES AND ATLAS

Hercules. Father Atlas, Jove sends me and tells me to salute you, and in case you are weary of your burden I am to take it on my shoulders for some hours, as I did I forget how many ages since, while you take breath and rest a little.

Atlas. I thank you, dear little Hercules, and I am much obliged also to Jove. But the world* has now become so light, that this cloak which I wear to shield

* Although Atlas is commonly said to sustain the heavens, it may be seen in *Odyssey*, Book i., v. 52 *et seq.*, and in the *Prometheus* of Æschylus, v. 347 *et seq.*, that the ancients also fabled that he supported the earth.

me from the snow is heavier on me ; and were it not that the will of Jove forces me to stand still here balancing this ball on my back, I would put it under my arm or in my pocket, or let it dangle from a hair of my beard, and go about my business.

Hercules. How the deuce has it got so light? I observe, indeed, that its form has changed, and that it has taken the form of a roll, and is no longer spherical as it was at the time I studied cosmography when I was about to make that long voyage with the Argonauts ; but still, I don't understand why it should be less weighty than it used to be.

Atlas. I don't know the reason ; but as to the fact, you may assure yourself of it at once if you will but take it in your hand for a moment.

Hercules. By the faith of Hercules, if I had not felt it I would never have believed it. But what is this other novelty I remark? When I carried it before it throbbed strongly on my back as the hearts of animals throb ; and there was a continuous buzzing noise from it as if it were a wasps' nest. But now it is like a watch whose spring has been broken, and is quite motionless ; and as to the buzzing, I hear not the faintest murmur of it.

Atlas. As to this also I don't know what to say, except that it is a long time now since the earth ceased to make any perceptible movement or sound ; and I had at first a very great suspicion that it was dead, and I expected from day to day to be infected with its corruption, so that I pondered how and where it could be buried, and what epitaph I could place over it. But when I saw that it did not rot I concluded that from an animal, which it was at first, it had been turned into a plant, like Daphne and so many others, and that this was the cause why it did not breathe or move. I doubt, even now, whether it will not soon strike its roots into my shoulders and fix itself there.

Hercules. I rather think that it is asleep, and that its slumber is like that of Epimenides*, that lasted

* See Pliny, Diogenes Laertius, Apollonius, etc.

half a century or more ; or its case possibly resembles that of *Hermotimus**, whose soul issued from his body whenever it pleased, and remained absent for many years, wandering at pleasure through various countries, and then returned : until at last his friends, to end such pranks, burned the body ; so that when the spirit returned to re-enter its home it found itself without one, and must therefore either lodge in some other body or go to an inn. But to make sure that the earth shall not sleep for ever, or that some friend or benefactor, thinking it dead, shall not set it on fire, I propose to try some mode of awakening it.

Atlas. Good ; but what mode ?

Hercules. I would give it a good knock with my club, but for fear that I might crush it and make a pancake of it, or perhaps crack it like an egg, seeing that its shell must now have become so light and thin. Besides, I do not feel sure that its inhabitants, who in my days were as willing to encounter lions as they now are fleas, would not die from the shock. I think it will be best for me to lay down my club, and for you to lay aside your cloak, so that we may have a game at catch-ball with the poor little globe. I am sorry that I haven't brought with me the gauntlets and rackets which Mercury and I use when we play in Jove's house or in the garden ; but we shall do very well with our bare hands.

Atlas. A capital idea : but what if your father, seeing us at play, should take it into his head to make a third in the game, and, hurling one of his thunderbolts at us, precipitate us I know not whither, even as Phaethon was pitched into the Po !

Hercules. No fear of that : I'm not Phaethon, the son of a poet, but the son of Jove himself. If the poets formerly peopled cities by the music of their lyres, I have vigour enough to unpeople heaven and earth to the sound of my club. As for the thunderbolt, I would send it flying with a single kick above the topmost attic of the universe. Be assured that even if

* See Apollonius, Pliny, Tertullian, etc.

a whim took me to make use of five or six stars for a game at cobnuts, or to use a comet as a sling, holding it by the tail, to throw stones at a mark, or even to use the sun itself to play at ball with, my father would pretend not to see. Besides, our intention in this game is to do good to the world, and not like Phaethon's, who only wanted to show his fleetness to the Hours, who assisted him to mount when he got into his car, and to acquire the reputation of a good charioteer with Andromeda and Callisto and the other fair constellations, to whom it is said he flung in passing bouquets of rays and comets of light; and who, in short, only wanted to make a fine show of himself before the gods in that day's excursion, which took place on a holiday. So don't trouble yourself about my father's anger, for whatever may happen I'll guarantee you against harm. So no more words: take off your cloak and pitch the ball.

Atlas. I must do as you bid me, whether willing or unwilling, since you are vigorous and well armed, while I am old and weaponless. But take care at least not to let it fall, so that it may not get fresh swellings, or that parts of it may not be fractured or broken off, as happened when Sicily was separated from Italy, and Africa from Spain. And mind that no splinter of it gets detached, such as a province or a kingdom, for that might give rise to a war.

Hercules. Have no fear for me.

Atlas. To you the ball. Do you see how lopsided it goes because of its altered shape?

Hercules. Come, hit harder, your strokes don't reach me.

Atlas. That is because the wind is south-west, as it usually is here, and the ball is so light that it is borne out of its course.

Hercules. Yes, it has always been used to sail before the wind.

Atlas. In truth, it would be well done if we puffed it out, for it has no more bounce in it now than a melon.

Hercules. That is quite a new fault, for anciently it bounded and leaped like a goat.

Atlas. Run quick there ; quick, I say ; take care for God's sake lest it fall : bad luck to the moment that brought you here !

Hercules. You threw it so wide and so low that I couldn't have caught it, even if I had hurried so as to break my neck. Alas ! poor little thing, how are you ? Do you feel hurt anywhere ? Not a breath to be heard, not a soul moves ; it is clear they are all still asleep.

Atlas. Give it back to me, by all the horns of the Styx, that I may settle it again on my shoulders ; and you take up your club and get back to heaven as soon as you can, and excuse me to Jove for this accident, which was all your fault.

Hercules. I will do so. For many ages there has dwelt in the house of my father a poet named Horace, admitted as court poet at the instance of Augustus, who was deified by Jove out of regard to the Roman power. This poet keeps chanting certain odes of his, in one of which he says that the just man would remain unmoved, even if the world should fall. It looks now as if all men are just, for the world has fallen and no one has moved.

Atlas. Who doubts the justice of men ? But don't stay here losing time, but hurry up as quickly as possible, and exculpate me with your father ; for I am expecting every moment a thunderbolt which will transform me from Atlas into Etna.

DIALOGUE OF FASHION AND DEATH

Fashion. Madam Death ! Madam Death !

Death. Wait till your hour comes, and then you will not need to call me.

Fashion. Madam Death !

Death. Go to the devil. I shall come to you when you don't want me.

Fashion. As if I were not immortal !

Death. Immortal ? ' More than a thousand years are past already ' since the times of the immortals ended.

Fashion. So, Madam, you quote Petrarch as if you were an Italian lyrist of the fifteenth or eighteenth century !

Death. I love the poems of Petrarch, because in one of them he celebrates my Triumph, and because he continually refers to me. But be good enough to leave me.

Fashion. One moment ! By your love of the seven capital sins, stop a little and look at me.

Death. I am doing so.

Fashion. Don't you know me ?

Death. You ought to know that my sight is bad, and that I have no spectacles, for the English make none to suit me ; and if they did I have no nose on which to put them.

Fashion. I am Fashion, your sister.

Death. My sister ?

Fashion. Yes ; do you not remember that we are both the children of Decay ?

Death. What have I, who am the chief foe of memory, to do with remembering ?

Fashion. But I well remember it ; and I know that both of us are ever engaged in changing and destroying all things here below, though you accomplish this object in one way, and I in another.

Death. If you are not speaking with your own thoughts, or with someone inside your throat, be good enough to raise your voice and articulate your words more distinctly ; for if you keep on mumbling between your teeth with that small spider voice, you had better talk to me some other time, since my hearing, as you ought to know, is no better than my sight.

Fashion. Although it is contrary to good manners, and in France it is unusual to speak so as to be heard, yet as we are sisters, and so need not stand upon

ceremony between ourselves, I will speak as you wish. I say that our common nature and custom is to continually renew the world ; but whereas you have from the beginning attacked the constitutions and lives of men, I am content for the most part to control their hair, beards, costumes, furniture, dwelling-places, and the like. It is, however, a fact that I sometimes play tricks which are in some respects like your own ; as, for instance, I induce men to bore holes in their ears, their lips, or their noses, and to torture themselves by fastening baubles in them. Sometimes I persuade them to burn themselves with red-hot stamps, which they use under the belief that they are increasing their beauty. I cause them to shape the heads of their infants with bandages and other appliances, making it obligatory that all the men of one nation should have heads of the same form, which is still the rule in some parts of Asia and America. I cripple people by causing them to wear shoes too small for them ; and make women wear corsets so tight that they can scarcely breathe, and their eyes almost start from their sockets. There is no end to the follies of this kind which I induce them to commit. In general, I persuade and constrain all men who wish to enjoy the good opinion of their fellows to support daily a thousand fatigues and a thousand discomforts, and often pains and injuries ; nay, they will even die sometimes for the love they bear me. I will not speak of the headaches, the colds, the catarrhs, the fevers of all descriptions—quotidian, tertian, quartan—which men subject themselves to for my sake ; being always willing to shiver with cold, or stifle with heat, if it is my will that their shoulders shall be covered with wool and their breasts with cotton. In fact, they obey my commands in all things, however much they may harm themselves thereby.

Death. In faith, I am now convinced that you are my sister, and will hold it to be as sure as death, without having a certificate from the parish priest for it. But standing still makes me faint ; so, if you are able, we will run, only I warn you that I go very

quickly, and so you must mind you don't break down. While we run you can tell me your business, or, if you are unable to keep pace with me, I will, at all events, promise you, in consideration of our relationship, to leave you all my goods at my death, and so, wishing you all good wishes, we will part.

Fashion. If we raced together for a prize, I know not which of us would win; for if you can run fast, I can go at a gallop; and if staying in one spot makes you faint, it is death to me. So let us start off, and as we run we will speak of our affairs.

Death. So let it be. And since we are sisters, I think you ought to help me in some way to do my business.

Fashion. I have already done much for you in the past—far more than you imagine. To begin with, I, who annul and change all other customs whatsoever, have never permitted the custom of dying to be discontinued, and thus it has endured from the beginning of the world unto this day.

Death. A great wonder, indeed, that you have not done what it was not in your power to do!

Fashion. Not in my power, eh? Let me tell you that you know nothing of the power of Fashion.

Death. Very good; we'll talk about this when it has become the custom not to die. But in the meantime, I want you, like a good sister, to help me to obtain the contrary result more easily and quickly than it has hitherto been effected.

Fashion. I have already mentioned some of the things which I have done for your benefit, but they are trifles in comparison with those which I will now unfold. Somewhat in all times, but chiefly in these days, I have, in order to serve your interests, brought into disuse and forgetfulness those manly labours and exercises which conduce so much to the bodily well-being, and introduced or brought into esteem countless others that weaken the body in a thousand ways and thus shorten life. Moreover, I have established in the world such ordinances and habits that life itself, whether that of the flesh or the spirit, is rather dead

than alive, insomuch that this age may well be termed the age of death. And whereas of old you had no other estates but graves and caverns where you sowed bones and ashes in darkness, which are seeds that bear no fruit, you have now fine properties above ground, and subjects who, though they go to and fro on the earth, are nevertheless from their birth entirely yours, and whom you may claim whenever you will. And furthermore, while formerly you were generally hated and vituperated, now, through my action, things have come to such a pass that all intelligent persons esteem and extol you, preferring you to life, and call upon you continually as their greatest hope. Finally, having observed that many men boasted that they would make themselves immortal—that is, that their better part would survive your malice—although I knew that these boasts were mere folly, and that if they lived, as they thought they would, in the memories of mankind, such remembrance could in no degree profit them, since they would no more enjoy it than they would suffer from the humidity of their sepulchres; I say that because this expectation of human fame seemed somewhat to diminish your honour and reputation, I have made it unfashionable to seek for it, and have also prevented its attainment, even in cases where it is really merited. So that now when a man dies, you may rest assured that not a particle of him survives: he is swallowed up by the grave even as a little fish is swallowed in a mouthful—head and tail and all. These things, which I think you will own are not trifles, I have done hitherto for love of you, and with the object of increasing your power, and not unsuccessfully. And with this object I am disposed to continue my labours, and therefore I have sought you out in order to make a proposal that henceforth we shall not separate, since if we keep together we shall be the better able to contrive means for the promotion of our common ends, and shall also be able to put them more effectually into operation.

Death. A very good plan, and I am very willing to adopt it.

PRIZES PROPOSED BY THE ACADEMY OF SILLOGRAPHS

THE Academy of Sillographs, in accordance with its leading object, desiring to further as much as possible the public welfare, and esteeming nothing to be more conducive to this end than to aid in promoting the progress and the tendencies

Of this most fortunate age in which we live, as an illustrious poet has said, has taken into its serious consideration the qualities and nature of our time, and after long and mature investigation has concluded that our era is best to be described as the age of machines, not only because the men of to-day live and act more mechanically than those of past ages, but also on account of the great number of machines which have been recently invented and utilised for so many purposes, so that now it may almost be said that the business of life is carried on by machines and not by men. In which circumstance the Academy rejoices, not so much because of the conveniences resulting from these inventions as for two reasons which it considers highly important, although they are generally overlooked. One is that it hopes in course of time the functions of machinery may be so extended as to comprehend not only material but also spiritual matters, so that as we are now protected by machines from injury by lightning, hailstorms, and other evils of the kind, so from time to time there will be invented, for instance (begging pardon for the novel names), an envy-defence, a calumny-guard, a perfidy-shield or fraud-screen, a safety-wire or other device that will preserve men from egotism, or from the dominion of mediocrity, from the prosperity of the stupid and the wicked, the prevalent spirit of indifference, the unhappiness of the wise, the good, and the magnanimous, and from the other misfortunes against which for many past ages and now

men have been and are less able to guard themselves than from the effects of lightning or hailstorms. The other and more important consideration arises from the fact that the most profound philosophers agree in their despair of ever being able to cure the many defects of the human race, declaring them to be much greater and more numerous than its virtues, and holding it for certain that it would be easier to remake it altogether, or to substitute a new species for it, than to amend it, on which account the Academy of Sillographs recommend that men should withdraw from the business of life, and give place little by little to machines. And being resolved to assist in promoting as far as possible the new order of things, it now proposes to present three prizes to the inventors of the three following machines :

The first machine is one which shall be capable of acting the part of a true friend ; one who will not mock at or censure his friend when absent ; who will not fail to defend him when he hears him dispraised or ridiculed ; who is too loyal to friendship to care to gain a reputation for wit or smartness at his comrade's expense ; who will not divulge a secret which has been confided to him merely from love of gossip, or in order to make an ostentatious display of his superior information ; who will not abuse the intimacy and trust reposed in him by his friend in order to surpass or supplant him, nor envy his good fortune ; but who will be solicitous for his welfare, watchful to prevent or repair his misfortunes, and always ready to assist him by deeds rather than words. For the other qualities required in this automaton, reference should be made to the treatises on Friendship of Cicero and of the Marquise de Lambert. The Academy considers that the construction of such a machine ought not to be accounted impossible or even extremely difficult ; for, not to mention the automata of Regiomontanus, Vaucanson, and others, and that which in London drew figures and portraits, and wrote to anyone's dictation, machines have even been invented which are capable of playing chess. Now, in the judgment of many sages

human life is no more than a game, and some even assert that many games are not so frivolous as it is, and they name in particular the game of chess, which is, they say, a thing more rationally conceived, and the conditions which govern it are more wisely ordered than those of man's existence. Pindar has said that life is a thing no more substantial than the shadow of a dream, and if so it ought not to be difficult for an automaton to discharge its functions. As to speech, there seems no reason to doubt that men have the power of bestowing it upon the machines they construct, this having been proved by various examples, and in particular by those of the statue of Memnon and the head fabricated by Albertus Magnus, which latter was so loquacious that Thomas Aquinas lost patience with it and broke it. And if the parrot of Nevers, whose story Gresset has related in his *Vert-vert* (though it is true that that was an animal), knew how to answer and speak to the point, why should it not be possible for the mind of man to imagine, and his hands to construct, a machine which should have as much intelligence as that bird? But it ought not to be so loquacious as the said parrot, or others which are every day seen and heard; nor must it, like the head made by Albertus Magnus, chatter so incessantly as to provoke the hearer to break it. The inventor of this machine will receive as prize a gold medal of the value of four hundred *zecchini*, which will bear on one side the figures of Pylades and Orestes, and on the other the name of the prize-winner, with this inscription, 'First Realiser of the Antique Fables.'

The second machine must be an artificial steam man, constructed for the purpose of performing virtuous and magnanimous actions. The Academy considers that, since all other means have failed, steam ought to be able to communicate to an automaton the desire and power of performing noble and glorious deeds. All who undertake to attempt to construct this machine are referred to works of poetry and romance, in which they will find described the qualities and functions with which this automaton should be endowed. The

inventor's reward shall be a gold medal weighing four hundred and fifty *zecchini*, stamped on the obverse with a design symbolising the golden age, and on the reverse the prize-winner's name, with this inscription taken from the fourth eclogue of Virgil, '*Quo ferrea primum desinet ac toto surget gens aurea mundo.*'

The third machine should be constructed so as to realise the ideal woman, such as she was delineated by Count Baldassar Castiglione in his book entitled *The Courtier*, and as she has been described by other writers whose works can be easily procured. The models found in these books should be carefully studied, compared, and followed. Nor should the invention of such a machine appear impossible to the men of these days, since Pygmalion, ages ago, when science was in its infancy, was able to fashion a wife for himself, who was, so it is said, the best wife who has ever existed. To the constructor of this machine shall be allotted a gold medal weighing five hundred *zecchini*, bearing on one side the figure of the Arabian Phoenix of Metastasio, perched on a tree of European origin; and on the other the name of the prize-winner, with the inscription, 'Inventor of Faithful Women and Conjugal Felicity.'

The Academy has resolved that, in order to meet the expenses which the giving of these prizes will entail, there shall be allotted all that was found in the satchel of Diogenes, at one time secretary to the Academy; or one of the three golden asses that formerly belonged to three distinguished members of the association, namely Apuleius, Firenzuola, and Machiavelli, all which effects were bequeathed to the Academy by the last wills and testaments of the above-named, as will be found duly recorded in its transactions.

DIALOGUE BETWEEN A SPRITE AND A GNOME

Sprite. Oh, are you here, son of Sabazius? Whither go you?

Gnome. My father has sent me to find out what the deuce these rascally men are plotting now. He is very suspicious about them, because for some time past they have not disturbed us, and in all our realm* there is not one to be seen. He thinks they must be making some great change in their affairs; and wonders whether they have returned to their ancient system of bartering sheep, instead of using gold and silver in their dealings, or whether the civilised nations are content with notes instead of cash, as they have sometimes been before; or with glass beads like the barbarians. Possibly they may have revived the laws of Lycurgus—though that seems to him very unlikely.

Sprite. 'Vainly you seek for them, for they are dead,' as was said at the close of a tragedy in which all the leading characters were slain.

Gnome. What do you mean?

Sprite. I mean that all men are dead, and the race is extinct.

Gnome. Oh, that is news to put in the papers! But how is it that none of them have as yet printed it?

Sprite. Blockhead! don't you see that since men no longer exist there will be no more newspapers?

Gnome. You are right. But how in future shall we learn the news of the world?

Sprite. What news? That the sun has risen or set, that the weather is warm or cold, that here or there it has rained or snowed, or that there has been a storm somewhere? Now that men no longer exist, Fortune

* It is perhaps needless to say that a Gnome is a spirit of the earth, while a Sprite ('Folletto' in the original) is a spirit of the air.—*Editor.*

has taken off her bandage and put on spectacles. She has hung her wheel on a hook, and now sits with her arms crossed, looking on at the world's affairs without interfering with them. For there are no empires now which keep on enlarging themselves until they burst like so many bubbles, since they have all disappeared. Warfare has ceased, and the years are as much like each other as one egg is like another.

Gnome. As no more almanacs will be printed we shall never be able to tell what day of the month it is.

Sprite. A great misfortune, truly ! But the moon will not therefore lose her way.

Gnome. And the days of the week will be henceforth nameless.

Sprite. What ! Do you fear that if you don't call them by name they won't come round as usual ? Or do you think that when they have once gone past they will return if you call on them by name ?

Gnome. We shall no longer be able to keep count of the years.

Sprite. Well, we can pretend we are still young when youth is past ; and keeping no account of the years we shall grieve the less over them. Even when we are very old we shall not be expecting death every day.

Gnome. But how have these rascals come to an end ?

Sprite. Many were killed in warfare ; some were drowned ; some were eaten by cannibals ; many committed suicide ; some perished by stagnating in idleness, others by distilling their brains into books, and yet more through gluttony, debauchery, and a thousand other excesses. In short, they studied in every way to act contrary to their nature, and to do themselves harm.

Gnome. Still, I cannot understand how a whole race of animals could be destroyed in the way you describe.

Sprite. I should have thought that such a learned geologist as you are would know well that this is no new thing. Many kinds of animals existed formerly which are now extinct, and nothing remains of them save a few petrified skeletons. And yet these creatures

never used any of the means which men adopted in order to bring about their own destruction.

Gnome. Yes, you are right. I only wish that one or two of the rogues could be resuscitated, so that we might see what they would think when they found that all other things were going on as usual, in spite of their disappearance. They always imagined that the world was maintained solely for their benefit.

Sprite. They could never realise the fact that it was created and is maintained for the use of the sprites.

Gnome. You speak like a true sprite ; but, of course, you are only joking.

Sprite. Joking ! Why, I was never more serious in my life.

Gnome. Stop that buffoonery. Who does not know that the world was created for the gnomes ?

Sprite. For the gnomes who live underground. That is the best joke I have ever heard. What is the use of the sun, the moon, the air, the sea, the fields, and the woods to the gnomes ?

Gnome. And what is the use of the gold and silver mines and all the rest of the earth, except its outer skin, to the sprites ?

Sprite. Well, well, we will agree to differ on this matter. Even lizards and guats, I suppose, believe that the world was made and planned for their welfare. Let each one retain his own opinion, since nothing can ever drive it out of his head. All I will say is this—that had I not been born a sprite I should despise myself.

Gnome. It would have been the same with me if I had not been born a gnome. I should like to hear now what excuses men would make for their former presumption, which caused them, among many other misdeeds, to burrow deeply in the earth, and take to themselves our property by force, pretending that it belonged to them. Nature, said they, had buried and hidden it away in sport, just to see whether they were clever enough to discover it and appropriate it.

Sprite. That was always their way. They not only believed that everything in or on the earth existed for

their benefit, but that all other things in comparison with them were of no consequence whatever. They called the petty changes in their affairs revolutions of the world, and styled the history of mankind the history of the world, although there are upon the earth perhaps as many different species of animals, not to mention inanimate things, as there are of individual men. Yet all these animals, which men supposed had been created expressly for their use, were quite unconscious of these wonderful revolutions!

Gnome. Did they think that fleas and gnats were made for their benefit?

Sprite. Oh, yes! In order to teach them patience, they said.

Gnome. As if there would have been nothing to try their patience if fleas had not existed!

Sprite. Pigs, according to a certain philosopher named Chrysippus, were pieces of flesh expressly prepared by nature to satisfy the appetites of men; and their souls, he said, were bestowed upon them to serve the purpose of salt—that is, to prevent them from putrifying.

Gnome. If Chrysippus had had in his brain a little salt instead of soul he would not have imagined such an absurdity.

Sprite. And here's another pleasantry: there are innumerable species of animals which have never been seen or known by man their master, either because they live in places which he has never visited, or because they are so minute that they are invisible to him. Very many were only discovered during the last days of mankind. The like may be said of plants and of many other things. Similarly, when from time to time, by means of their telescopes, they perceived some star or planet which had for countless ages remained unknown to them, they forthwith entered it in the catalogue of their possessions, as though they thought that the constellations were no more than so many candles hung up aloft to give light to their lordships, who were often very busy during the night.

Gnome. Yes; and when in summer-time they saw

those meteor-flames, which in certain nights shoot through the sky, they fancied that they were spirits who were engaged in snuffing the star-candles to serve their convenience.

Sprite. Yet now that they have all disappeared the earth does not seem to miss them : the rivers continue to flow, and the sea does not dry up, although it is no longer used for commerce and navigation.

Gnome. The stars and the planets still rise and set ; nor have they put on mourning.

Sprite. Neither has the sun plastered his visago with rust, as he did, according to Virgil, when Cæsar died, about whom he concerned himself, I believe, as much as did the statue of Pompey.

DIALOGUE BETWEEN MALAMBRUNO AND FARFARELLO

Mal. Spirits of the abyss, Farfarello, Ciriatto, Baconero, Astarotte, Alichino, or whatever you are called, I conjure you in the name of Beelzebub, and command you by the virtue of my art, which can change the moon's course and nail the sun in the middle of the heavens ; come, one of you, with free charter from your prince and full power to employ all the forces of hell in my service.

Far. I am here.

Mal. Who are you ?

Far. Farfarello, at your service.

Mal. Do you bring with you the commission of Beelzebub ?

Far. Yes ; and I can do for you all that my king could do, and more than could be done by all other creatures together.

Mal. It is well. I have a desire which I want you to satisfy.

Far. You shall be obeyed. What would you? Nobility surpassing that of the Atridæ?

Mal. No.

Far. Riches greater than will be found in the city of Manoa when it is discovered?

Mal. No.

Far. An empire as great as that which it is said was once dreamt of by Charles the Fifth?

Mal. No.

Far. Would you have a mistress chaster than Penelope?

Mal. No. Only a fool would ask such a thing from the devil.

Far. Would you have honours and prosperity in spite of your evil conduct?

Mal. Rather should I need the devil if I wanted the contrary.

Far. Then what do you want?

Mal. Make me happy for an instant.

Far. I cannot.

Mal. Why not?

Far. I swear to you on my conscience that I cannot do it.

Mal. On the conscience of an honest devil?

Far. Yes, certainly. There are honest devils as there are honest men.

Mal. Depend upon it, if you don't do what I wish
• without more words I will tie you up by your tail to one of these beams.

Far. It would be easier for you to kill me than for me to satisfy your demand.

Mal. Go back, then, with my malediction, and let Beelzebub come here himself.

Far. If Beelzebub came himself attended by all the inhabitants of the Inferno, including the dwellers in the Giudecca,* he could not make you happy, nor any of your species, any more than I can.

Mal. Not even for a moment?

* The Giudecca is the fourth sphere of the ninth and lowest circle of Hell in Dante's *Inferno*. It takes its name from Judas Iscariot.

Far. It is just as impossible for a moment, half a moment, or the thousandth part of a moment, as for a whole lifetime.

Mal. Well, though you cannot make me happy in any way, yet surely you can at least free me from absolute misery?

Far. Yes, on condition that you cease to love yourself above all else.

Mal. That will only be possible when I am dead.

Far. No animal can do it during life; and the nature of man more especially is such that he will sacrifice anything rather than his love of self.

Mal. True.

Far. Therefore, since you love yourself with the greatest love of which you are capable, you necessarily desire in the utmost degree your own happiness; and as this desire can never be satisfied even in the smallest measure, it follows that you can never escape from being unhappy.

Mal. Not even when I seem to taste some pleasure; for no pleasure can make me happy or contented.

Far. None, truly.

Mal. And as no pleasure can satisfy the natural desire for happiness which is implanted in my mind, it cannot be a true pleasure; and even while it lasts I shall not cease to be unhappy.

Far. That is so indeed; for in man and in all living creatures the privation of happiness, even though unattended with pain or misfortune, involves positive unhappiness; and this is so even during the enjoyment of so-called pleasures.

Mal. So that from birth to death our unhappiness does not cease even for an instant?

Far. Yes, it ceases whenever you sleep without dreaming, or when you fall into a swoon, or lose consciousness from any other cause.

Mal. But never while we are sensible of our existence?

Far. Never.

Mal. So that, speaking absolutely non-existence is always better than life?

Far. Yes, if it is better not to be unhappy than to be always wretched.

Mal. Then?

Far. Then if you feel disposed to give up your soul to me before its time, I am ready at once to receive it.

DIALOGUE BETWEEN NATURE AND A SOUL

N. Go, my darling child, for such you shall be accounted and called through a long series of ages. Live, and be great and unhappy.

S. What evil have I wrought before living, that you condemn me to this punishment?

N. What punishment, my child?

S. Do you not ordain me to be unhappy?

N. Only in so far as I would have you be great; and you cannot be this without being that. Moreover, you are destined to vivify a human body; and all mankind necessarily are born and live unhappy.

S. But, on the contrary, it would be better were you so to arrange that they should be necessarily happy; or, if unable to do this, it would become you to abstain from sending them into the world.

N. Neither the one nor the other is in my power, for I am subject to Fate, which ordains otherwise, whatever be the cause, for neither you nor I can understand it. Now as you have been created and prepared to inform a human body, there is no power either in me or in anyone else mighty enough to save you from the unhappiness common to all men. But in addition to this you will have to sustain an unhappiness peculiar to yourself, and much greater, through the excellence with which I have endowed you.

S. I have not yet learned anything, just now commencing to live, and this must be the reason that I

do not understand you. But tell me, are excellence and extraordinary unhappiness in substance the same thing? or if they are two things, could you not sever the one from the other?

N. In the souls of men, and proportionately in those of all kinds of animals, it may be affirmed that the one and the other are almost the very same thing: because the excellence of the souls involves greater intensity of life; and this involves a greater sense of their unhappiness; which is as much as to say, greater unhappiness. Similarly, the greater vitality of the mind includes greater strength of self-love, whatever may be the manner in which it is manifested: which superiority of self-love implies greater desire for felicity, and therefore greater discontent and anguish in the privation of it, and greater suffering in all adversities. All this is included in the original and perpetual system of created things which I cannot alter. And besides this, the subtlety of your own intellect and the vivacity of your imagination will exclude you in a very great measure from mastership over yourself. The lower animals easily use every faculty and force they possess toward the ends at which they aim. But men very seldom employ all their force; being usually hindered by reason and imagination; which create a thousand doubts in the meditation and a thousand obstacles in the execution. Those least apt or least used to ponder and examine themselves, are the most prompt in resolution, and the most vigorous in action. But those like you, continually self-involved, and as it were overpowered by the very greatness of their own faculties, and thus weakened by themselves, are nearly always subject to irresolution both in deliberating and in acting: and this is one of the greatest torments that afflict human life. Add that while, by the excellence of your nature, you will easily and in little time surpass almost all the others of your species in the most weighty studies and most arduous disciplines; you will nevertheless always find it impossible or supremely difficult either to learn or to put in practice a multi-

tude of things, most trivial in themselves, but most necessary in commerce with other men ; things which you will at the same time see performed perfectly and mastered without trouble by innumerable minds not only inferior to yours, but altogether contemptible. These and other infinite difficulties and miseries occupy and encompass great minds. But they are abundantly recompensed by the fame, the eulogies and the honours, which the greatness of these eminent spirits wins for them ; and by the enduring remembrance they leave of themselves to posterity.

S. But those praises and honours you mention, I shall have them from heaven, or from yourself, or from whom else ?

N. From men : because none else than men can give them to you.

S. See now, I was thinking that not knowing how to do the things most necessary, as you say, to social commerce with men, and which are quite facile to even the poorest minds ; so far from being honoured, I should be scorned and shunned by these same men ; or certainly should live ignored by nearly all of them, as unfit for human society.

N. It is not given me to foresee the future ; nor, therefore, to predict to you infallibly how men will act and think with regard to you while you are on earth. It is indeed true that from the experience of the past I infer that most probably they will persecute you with envy ; which is another calamity commonly encountered by eminent spirits ; or that they will try to crush you with disdain and indifference. And moreover, even fortune and chance are generally inimical to such as you. But immediately after death, as occurred with one called Camoens, or at latest some few years after, as happened with another called Milton, you will be celebrated and extolled to heaven, I do not say by all, but at any rate by the small number of men of good judgment. And perchance the ashes of the body in which you have dwelt will repose in a magnificent sepulchre ; and its features, imitated in various manners, will circulate

among men; and the accidents of its life will be described by several, and by others committed to memory with studious care: and at least the whole civilised world will be full of its name. Always excepting that by the malignity of fortune, or by the very superabundance of your faculties, you should be perpetually hindered from showing men any proportionate sign of your worth; of which in truth there have not lacked many examples, known to me only and to Fate.

S. My dear mother, although I am as yet void of further knowledge, I feel that the greatest, or rather the sole desire which you have given me is for happiness. And granted that I am capable of the desire for glory, I certainly cannot long for this (good or ill, I know not which to term it), except solely as happiness, or as useful towards the acquisition of happiness. Now, by what you have said, the excellence with which you have endowed me may indeed be necessary or profitable to the acquisition of glory; but it does not therefore tend to felicity, or rather it tends strongly to infelicity. Nor even to glory will it probably conduct me before death: and when death has arrived, what use or pleasure can reach me from the greatest boons in the world? And lastly, it may easily occur, as you say, that this crabbed glory, the recompense for so much suffering, will not be attained by me at all, not even after death. So, from your own words, I conclude that instead of loving me specially as you affirmed at the beginning, you rather hate me with more anger and malevolence than I shall experience from mankind and from fortune while in the world; since you have not hesitated to bestow upon me a gift so calamitous as this vaunted excellence which will be one of the chief obstacles hindering me from attaining my sole intent, that is felicity.

N. My dear child, all the souls of men, as I have said to you, are assigned in prey to unhappiness, without my fault. But in the universal misery of the human state, and in the infinite vanity of all its pleasures and advantages, glory is esteemed by the

better part of mankind the greatest good vouchsafed to mortals, and the most worthy prize that can be proposed for their cares and efforts. Whence, not in hate, but in the genuine and special benevolence I feel for you, I thought to give you for the attainment of this end all the assistance in my power.

S. Tell me, among the other animals, which you mentioned, does it happen that any are furnished with less vitality and feeling than man?

N. Beginning from those that are little more than plants, all are in this respect, some more and some less, inferior to man, who has more fulness of life and more feeling than any other animal, as being of all living creatures the most perfect.

S. Then place me, if you love me, in the most imperfect: or if you cannot do this, take away the calamitous gifts that ennoble me, and make me conformable to the most stupid and stolid human spirit that you ever at any time produced.

N. In this last thing I can please you; and I am about to do so: since you refuse the immortality towards which I had prepared your way.

S. And in exchange for the immortality, I beseech you to accelerate my death as much as possible.

N. As to this I will confer with Destiny.

DIALOGUE BETWEEN THE EARTH AND THE MOON

Earth. Dear Moon, I know that you are able to converse, since you are a person, as the poets have many times assured me; besides which, our children say that you really have a mouth, nose, and eyes like their own, and that they can see this with their own eyes, which at their age must naturally be very sharp. As for me, you are no doubt aware that I am also

a person—so much so, that in my younger days I bore many children ; and so it will not astonish you to hear me speak. Well, my darling Moon, although I have been your neighbour for so many ages that I have lost count of their number, I have never spoken a word to you until now, because my own affairs kept me so busy that I had no leisure left to chatter. But now my business gives me very little trouble, and, indeed, almost takes care of itself; in consequence of which the time hangs heavy on my hands, and I am almost bored to death. So for the future I should like to talk to you every now and then about your affairs, provided that it is not too much trouble to you.

Moon. Don't be afraid of that. I wish I was as much assured against all other troubles as I am assured that you won't give me any. Talk to me, by all means, if it seems good to you ; for although I am fond of silence, as I believe you are aware, I am quite willing to converse with you if you wish me to.

Earth. Do you hear the delightful harmony which emanates from the celestial bodies as they move through the heavens?

Moon. To tell you the truth, I hear no sound at all.

Earth. Nor do I, except the sound of the rushing of the wind from my poles to the equator, or from the equator to the poles--and there's little music in that. But Pythagoras asserted that the celestial spheres give forth a wonderfully sweet harmony, in which, he said, you take a part, and are the eighth chord of this universal lyre. As for me, I am, he said, deafened by the sound, and that is why I don't hear it.

Moon. I suppose I also am deafened by the sound, for I certainly do not hear it ; and as to being a chord, that is news to me.

Earth. Let us change the subject. Tell me, are you really inhabited, as many philosophers, ancient and modern, from Orpheus to De la Lande, have affirmed and sworn? For though I often try to pretend these horns of mine, which men call mountains and peaks, as far as possible, and from their points gaze at you in the fashion of a snail looking out from its shell,

I have never yet been able to discover in you a single inhabitant. It is said, however, that a certain David Fabricius, whose sight was keener than that even of Lynceus, once saw some of your people spreading their washing in the sun to dry.

Moon. About your horns I know nothing ; but it is a fact that I am inhabited.

Earth. Of what colour are your men ?

Moon. What men ?

Earth. Those you contain. Did you not say you are inhabited ?

Moon. Oh, yes ! But what then ?

Earth. Well, I suppose you have other inhabitants besides beasts ?

Moon. Neither beasts nor men ; though I don't know what you mean by those terms. And, indeed, I do not in the least understand what you have been saying about your men, as you call them.

Earth. But what sort of creatures are yours ?

Moon. Very many, and of many kinds, as little known to you as yours are to me.

Earth. All this is so strange to me, that if I had not heard it from yourself I could not have believed it. Did any of your inhabitants ever conquer you ?

Moon. Not that I am aware of. And how ? and why ?

Earth. Through ambition or greed ; by means of diplomacy or arms.

Moon. I don't know what you mean by arms, ambition, diplomacy ; in fact, I don't know what you are talking about.

Earth. But surely you know what war is, even if you don't know the meaning of arms ; for not long since one of our astronomers, by the aid of a telescope, which is an instrument by means of which things very far off can be seen, discovered on your surface a fine fortress with regular bastions, which shows that your inhabitants are at least acquainted with sieges and mural assaults.

Moon. Pardon me, Mother Earth, if I answer you rather more freely than becomes one of your subjects or servants, such as I am. But, really, you appear to me

beyond measure vain in imagining that all things in all parts of creation must necessarily resemble the things which are known to you, as if Nature was bound to imitate you in all her proceedings. I tell you that I am inhabited, and you immediately conclude that my inhabitants must be men. I inform you that they are not; but yet, knowing that they are creatures of another kind, you still assume that they have the same qualities, and live under the same conditions as your own people, in confirmation of which you tell me a story about the telescope. I know not what astronomer. But if his telescope does not see more clearly in other cases than in this, I shall think that it is of no more use than your children's sight, which discovers in me eyes, nose, and mouth, none of which, so far as I am aware, do I possess.

Earth. Then it is not true that your provinces are furnished with excellent roads, and that you are cultivated, as can be clearly seen with a telescope from Germany? *

Moon. If my surface is cultivated it is without my knowledge, and if I have roads they have escaped my observation.

Earth. Dear Moon, you must know that I am somewhat dull and slow-witted, and it is no wonder, therefore, that it is easy for men to deceive me. But I must tell you that if your own inhabitants have no intention of conquering you, nevertheless you have not always been free from danger. At various times many people down here have had thoughts of conquering you, and have made great preparations for that purpose. Some tried to reach you by ascending to my highest places, raising themselves on tiptoe, and stretching forth their arms; but somehow they failed to reach you. Moreover, for some time past men have been minutely studying every part of you, making maps of your surface, and measuring the heights of

* The German newspapers for March, 1824, contained accounts of various discoveries in the moon, which were said to have been made by one Gruithuisen.

your mountains, of which they know even the names. I tell you these things out of pure good will to you, in order that you may be prepared for every emergency. . . . Now, let me ask you another question or two. Are you much annoyed by the dogs which bark so incessantly against you? What think you of those who show you to others in a well? * Are you feminine or masculine? for of old opinions differed much on this point. † Is it true that you did not exist in the time of the Arcadians? ‡ Or that your women, or whatever they should be called, are oviparous, and that one of their eggs fell down here once upon a time? § Are you pierced through the middle like a bead, as a modern philosopher asserts? Are you made of green cheese, as some Englishmen think? Is it a fact that Mohammed one day, or rather one night, cut you in halves, as though you were a water-melon, and that a large slice of your body slipped into his sleeve? Why do you stay so long on the tops of minarets? And what are your views about the feast of Bairam?

Moon. Continue your questions, for while you chatter thus I need not answer, and can remain silent, as I prefer to do. If you like to amuse yourself with such fooleries, and cannot find more sensible subjects of conversation, instead of talking to me, who cannot understand you, I would recommend you to get your men to make another planet, composed and peopled to your liking, to wheel around you. It seems that you are unable to speak except about men, and dogs, and such things, about which I know no more than I do about that gigantic sun, around which, it is said, our own sun revolves.

Earth. Really, the more I try, in talking to you, to

* *Mostrar la luna nel pozzo*: to show the moon in a well = to make one believe any incredible thing.

† The question of the gender of the moon was much discussed among the ancients. Some nations worshipped it as a god, and some as a goddess.

‡ See Menander, in *Rhetor. graec. veter.*, lib. 1, ch. xv.

§ *Athenæus*, lib. 2, ed. Casaubon, p. 57.

avoid speaking of myself, the less I succeed. But I will endeavour to be more careful in future. Tell me, is it you who amuse yourself by drawing the water of my seas to a height and then letting it fall?

Moon. It may be so; but if I produce that or any other effect on you, it is done unconsciously. In the same way you are probably not aware of the many effects which you produce here, and which must be much greater than those I produce on you, because you are so much greater in size and strength.

Earth. Truly I know nothing of any such effects, except that from time to time I deprive you of the light of the sun and myself of yours. I also illuminate your nights, a fact which I am able on some occasions to observe. But I am forgetting one thing of more importance than all the rest. I want to know whether Ariosto's statement is true, that everything which a man loses, such as youth, beauty, health, the toils and expenses incurred in studying how to gain an honourable reputation in the world, in the education of children, and in the founding or promoting of useful institutions, ascends to you, so that you have in your dominions all human things, except the follies, which never depart from mankind. If this is true, I reckon that you must be very much overcrowded, for men have recently lost many things—such as, for example, patriotism, virtue, magnanimity, and rectitude—not only partially or singly, as heretofore, but wholly and universally. Certainly if these things are not with you, I don't know where else to look for them. Therefore I should like to make an agreement with you that you shall return me now and henceforth from time to time these lost things, which I daresay you will be glad to be rid of, particularly of the good sense, which I imagine must take up a good deal of your room. If you agree to this, I will engage that my men shall pay you annually a substantial sum of money.

Moon. You are talking of men again; and though you say that folly does not leave your domains, you want me to lose all my good sense in seeking for that of men. As to that I haven't the least idea where it is,

or whether it is to be found in any part of the creation. It certainly isn't here, nor are the other things which you inquire about.

Earth. At least, you can tell me if vices, crimes, misfortunes, sufferings, old age—in short, evils generally, are known in your domains? I suppose you understand the meaning of these words?

Moon. Oh, yes. I understand not only the words, but the things which they signify. I know them only too well, for I am full of them, instead of the other things which you mentioned.

Earth. Are virtues or vices most prevalent amongst your inhabitants?

Moon. Vices are by far more common than virtues.

Earth. Are good or evil most potent with you?

Moon. Evil, beyond comparison.

Earth. And are your inhabitants, generally speaking, happy or unhappy?

Moon. So unhappy that I would not change my lot with the most fortunate of them.

Earth. It is the same here; and I am astonished that, being so different in other respects, we are so much alike in this.

Moon. I resemble you in form and in movement, and I am, like you, illumined by the sun. It is no greater wonder that I should resemble you in these respects than in those others which we have been talking about. Evil is common to all the universe, or at least to all the members of our solar system; and is as much a consequence of the nature of things as is the rotundity of form of the planets. And if you could raise your voice so as to be heard by Saturn or Uranus, or any other planet of our system, and were to ask them whether unhappiness dwelt in them, and whether in them good or evil predominated, they would answer just as I have done. This I say because I have already questioned Venus and Mercury, to which planets I am somewhat nearer than you, on these points; in addition to which I have questioned some comets which have passed near me; and all have answered in the same way. And I believe that the sun himself, and all the

rest of the heavenly bodies, would give the same answer.

Earth. Nevertheless, I am still hopeful ; for men are now promising me much future happiness.

Moon. Hope on by all means ; eternity will give you plenty of time for hoping.

Earth. What do you think is happening ? My men and beasts are beginning to make a stir, because on the side from which I am speaking to you it is night, as you see, or rather, do not see, and they were all asleep ; but the noise of our conversation has awakened and frightened them.

Moon. But with me, as you see, it is day.

Earth. I don't want to alarm my people, or disturb their sleep, which is their greatest boon. Therefore we will talk again another time. Adieu, then : good day.

Moon. Adieu : good night.

THE WAGER OF PROMETHEUS

IN the year eight hundred and thirty-three thousand two hundred and seventy-five of the reign of Jove, the College of the Muses caused to be printed and exhibited in the public places and suburbs of the city of Hypernephelus certain placards, in which all the gods, great and small, and the other inhabitants of the said city, who had in former times or recently made some valuable discovery, were invited to submit either the invention itself, or a model or written description of it, to certain judges appointed by the said college. And, regretting that in consequence of its notorious poverty it could not be as liberal as it desired to be, it offered as a prize to the competitor whose invention should be deemed most beautiful or most useful, a crown of laurel, together with the privilege of wearing the same at all times, in public and in private, within

or without the city. He would also have the right of being painted, sculptured, engraved, moulded, or represented in any manner or in any material with the laurel crown upon his head.

Not a few of the celestials competed for this prize just by way of passing the time, a thing quite as necessary to the inhabitants of Hypernephelus as to those of other cities, not that they cared in the least for the crown, which was not worth the price of a cotton nightcap, while as for the glory to be gained, if men as soon as they have gained wisdom despise such honours, it may easily be conceived in what esteem they are held by the gods, who have so much more wisdom than men, or rather who alone are wise, according to Pythagoras and Plato.

With an unexampled and until then unheard-of impartiality in similar cases, the prize was adjudged to the most deserving, without the use of any unfair influences, such as solicitations, secret promises, or other kinds of intrigue. Three competitors were chosen, namely, Bacchus, for the discovery of wine; Minerva, for that of the oil which the gods are accustomed to use daily for anointing themselves after bathing; and Vulcan, for the invention of an economical copper saucepan, by means of which food can be quickly cooked, and with little fuel. The prize having thus to be divided into three parts, there fell to each of the victors a little sprig of laurel; but all three refused to accept their share, or even the undivided crown. Vulcan alleged that as the greater part of his time was spent in working and sweating before the fire of his forge, such an encumbrance on his forehead would be very troublesome, besides which he would run the risk of being singed or burnt if by chance a spark were to fall upon its dry leaves and set them on fire. Minerva said that as she had to sustain on her head a helmet large enough to cover the armies of a hundred cities, as Homer has told us, she did not at all care to increase that weight. Bacchus would not exchange his mitre and crown of vine leaves for the laurel, although he would willingly have accepted it if

he had been permitted to use it as a sign outside his tavern; but the Muses refused to give it to him for this purpose, and so it remained in their own possession.

None of the other competitors for the prize envied the three divinities who had won and rejected it, nor complained of the judges, nor found fault with their decision, save one alone, and this was Prometheus. He had taken part in the competition by sending to the judges the clay model which he had used in forming the first man, together with a written description of the qualities and functions of the human race, which owed its existence to him. Much astonishment was caused by the irritation which he showed in this matter, since all the other competitors, victors and vanquished alike, had looked upon it as little more than a jest. But it soon appeared that he did not so much desire the honour as the privilege that he would have acquired had he been the victor. Some thought that he would have availed himself of the laurel to defend his head against tempests, believing that it cannot be struck by lightning, as it is told of the Emperor Tiberius that whenever he heard thunder he always put on his crown. But in the city of Hypernephelus it neither thunders nor lightens. Others, with more likelihood, affirm that Prometheus, in consequence of age, had begun to lose his hair, a misfortune which, like many others, he endured very unwillingly, not having read the book written by Synesius in praise of baldness, or (which is more likely, perhaps), not being convinced by it, and therefore he desired to conceal its loss by wearing the diadem of laurel as Julius Cæsar did.

But let us proceed with our story. One day Prometheus, discussing the matter with Momus, complained bitterly that wine, oil, and a saucepan had been preferred to the human race, which, he affirmed, was the best and most perfect work which the immortals had ever created. But he found that Momus, who kept on alleging all sorts of arguments against his contention, could not be persuaded to agree with him, and so at

last he proposed that they should go down to earth together and visit its five divisions, choosing in each at haphazard the first place they came to which they found to be inhabited by men; their purpose in so doing being to discover whether in all or in most of the places chosen they could find evidence to prove that man is the most perfect creature in the universe. Thereupon a wager was made between them, Momus, of course, taking the opposite side to Prometheus. The amount of the wager having been settled, they began without delay to descend towards the earth, directing their course to the New World, partly because of its name, and partly because none of the immortals had yet set foot in it, so that it more particularly stimulated their curiosity. They first alighted in the northern part of the kingdom of Popiaian, not far from the river Cauca, in a place where many signs of human habitation appeared, such as vestiges of cultivation in the plains, numerous roads, which were, however, impassable or obstructed in many places; trees lopped and felled, and more particularly what seemed like graves, while here and there human bones were scattered about. But the two celestials were not able anywhere to discover a trace of any living human beings, though they looked all around them and listened for their voices. They went on, partly walking, partly flying, for several miles; passing hills and rivers, and finding everywhere the same signs and the same solitude. 'How is it that these districts, which were evidently once inhabited, are now deserted?' said Momus to Prometheus. The latter mentioned as probable causes of the desolation which they beheld, the inundations of the sea, the earthquakes, the tempests, the floods of rain, which are common in tropical regions; and, indeed, at that very time they heard from all the neighbouring woods the noise of raindrops continually falling from the branches of trees as the wind agitated them. But Momus could not comprehend how that district could be subject to inundations from the sea, which was so far from where they were that it could nowhere be seen; and still less could he

understand how it was that the earthquakes, tempests, and floods could have destroyed the men of the country, while sparing the jaguars, monkeys, ants, eagles, and a hundred other wild animals of the earth and air which they saw around them. At last, descending into an immense valley, they discovered a small group of houses, or rather wooden huts, covered with palm-leaves, each one of which was encompassed by a stockade-like fence. In front of one of these cabins many people were gathered, some sitting, some standing, around an earthen vessel which was suspended over a great fire. The two celestials, having taken the human form, approached the group, and Prometheus, after courteously saluting all, turned to the one who seemed to be the chief, and inquired what they were doing.

Savage. We are eating, as you see.

Prom. What good food have you?

Sav. Only this piece of meat.

Prom. Is it the flesh of a wild or domestic animal?

Sav. Domestic, since it is the flesh of my son.

Prom. Had you a calf for a son, like Pasiphæ?

Sav. Not a calf, but a boy, such as others have.

Prom. Are you really serious? Do you eat your own flesh?

Sav. Not my own flesh, but certainly his, since it was for this very purpose I engendered him, and have nourished him.

Prom. What! In order to eat him?

Sav. Yes. Why do you wonder at that? And his mother, too, as soon as she ceases to bear children.

Momus. As one eats a hen after having eaten all her eggs.

Sav. And I will eat my other women, too, when they become useless for child-bearing. And my slaves, whom you see here, do you think I would keep them alive if they did not every now and then give birth to children for me to eat? *

* In a footnote to this passage, Leopardi refers the reader to the *Chronicles of Pietro de Cieza*, a Spaniard,

Prom. Tell me, are these slaves of your own nation or of some other?

Sav. Of another.

Prom. Far from here?

Sav. So far that a rivulet runs between their habitations and ours.

Then, pointing to a hillock, he added, 'They used to live there, but our people have destroyed them and their dwellings.'

At this moment it struck Prometheus that the savages were regarding him with the sort of loving look that a cat bestows upon a mouse; and so, to avoid being eaten by those whom he had created, he suddenly rose in flight, and with him Momus also. So great was their terror, that in flying away they seasoned the food of the barbarians with that sort of impurity which the Harpies discharged upon the tables of the Trojans. But the savages, more hungry or less queasy than the companions of Æneas, continued their meal.

Prometheus, much dissatisfied with the New World, directed his course towards the more ancient - that is to say, to Asia; and having traversed almost in an instant the space between the new and the ancient Indies, the celestials descended near Agra in a field full of innumerable people gathered around a trench full of wood, on one side of which were a number of men with torches ready to set fire to the fuel; and on a platform on the other side was a young woman clothed with sumptuous raiments, ornamented with all sorts of barbaric ornaments, who was dancing and shouting and showing every sign of the most extravagant joy. Prometheus, on seeing her, imagined she must be a new Lucretia or Virginia, or some emulator of the daughters of Erechtheus, or of Iphigenia, Codrus, Menecius, Curtius, or Decius, who, in obedience to the command of some oracle, was about to render up herself for a sacrifice in order to save her country. But being

who testifies that such barbarities were actually perpetrated among the Peruvians. As to that author's good faith and the authenticity of his narrative, see Robertson's *History of America*, Book vi.

told that the woman was about to be burned in consequence of her husband's death, he thought that she, like Alcestis, was about to immolate herself in order to restore her husband to life. Being, however, further informed that she only consented to the sacrifice because ancient custom compelled all widows of her caste to make it, and that, so far from loving her husband, she had always hated him ; while her manifestations of joy were due to the influence of strong drink, and moreover that there was so little idea of resuscitating the husband that his body was to be burned in the same fire with her, he at once turned his back upon the scene and set out for Europe. While proceeding thither, he held the following colloquy with his companion :—

Momus. Did you think when, with so much risk to yourself, you stole fire from heaven to communicate it to men, that they would employ your gift, some to cook their fellows in pots, and others to burn themselves voluntarily to death ?

Prom. Certainly not. But consider, dear Momus, that those whom we have as yet seen are barbarians, and human nature ought not to be judged from them, but from the civilised peoples to whose kingdoms we are now travelling. Among them I am convinced that we shall see and hear things that will be not only praiseworthy but astonishing.

Momus. For my part, I cannot see why men should need to be civilised out of burning themselves to death, or eating their own children, if they are the most perfect creatures in the universe. None of the other animals are civilised, and yet they do not burn themselves, although the phoenix has been fabled to do so ; very rarely do any of them eat their own kind, and more rarely still do they feed on their own offspring, and then only through some strange accident, and not because they had generated them for that purpose. Remark, also, that of the five divisions of the world, one only, and that the smallest, and not even all of that, is endowed with the civilisation which you extol ; except, indeed, some petty portions of another.

And I don't think even you will assert that this civilisation is so perfect at the present day that the men of Paris or Philadelphia have reached the highest standard of which the race is capable. Yet in order that they might reach their present state of civilisation, for how many ages have the people worked and suffered? From their very origin down to the present day. And almost all the inventions which were necessary or conducive to the attainment of a civilised state have had their origin rather from chance than design; so that civilisation is rather the result of accident than of natural development; and where no such chance discoveries have taken place the people are still barbarians, although they are just as ancient as the civilised races. From these facts I infer that if uncivilised men are in many points inferior to all other animals; if civilisation, which is the opposite of barbarism, is only possessed, even at the present day, by a small portion of the human race, and if that portion has only been able to attain this state after the lapse of innumerable ages, and more by chance than by any other cause; and lastly, if this state is far from being perfect: considering, I say, all these things, ought not your judgment on the human race to be that though it is indeed supreme over all other kinds of animals, it is supreme rather in imperfection than in perfection? It is true that men themselves, in speaking and judging, are continually misled by the ambiguity of these terms; but that is because they found their opinions upon certain preconceived ideas, which they consider to be undoubted truths. All other creatures, it is certain, have been from their first creation in a state of perfection. And even if it were not clear that man in the savage state, considered with respect to other animals, is the least perfect of them, I cannot persuade myself that the fact of his being imperfect in his own nature, as it cannot be denied that he is, gives him a claim to be accounted superior to all other creatures. In addition to this, it is to be observed that human civilisation, so difficult to establish, and perhaps impossible to render perfect, is not

so stable that it cannot fall into decay ; and we find, in fact, that it has frequently so fallen among various peoples who had in great measure obtained it. In sum, I conclude that if your brother Epimethens had brought before the judge the model from which he formed the first ass or the first frog, he would have had a better chance of winning the first prize than you had. However, I will willingly concede to you that man is quite perfect, if you will allow that his perfection resembles that which Plotinus attributes to the world. The world, said he, is absolutely perfect, but to constitute a perfect world it is necessary that it should have, among other things, every possible evil ; and, in fact, such is its condition. And from this point of view I might perhaps agree with Leibnitz that this present world is the best of all possible worlds.

No doubt Prometheus had a ready answer, clear, precise, and logical, to all these arguments ; but it is equally certain that he did not give utterance to it ; for they had now reached the city of London, where they descended. Seeing a multitude of people gathered around the door of a private house, they joined the crowd and entered the dwelling. There they saw upon a bed a man lying on his back, a pistol in his hand, and a wound in his breast. He was dead ; and beside him lay two little children, also dead. There were in the room several inmates of the house, and some officials, who were interrogating them, while a clerk wrote down their replies.

Prom. Who are these unfortunates ?

A Servant. My master and his children.

Prom. Who has slain them ?

Serv. My master.

Prom. Do you really mean that he has killed his children and himself ?

Serv. Yes, indeed !

Prom. What caused him to commit so great a crime ? Had some terrible calamity befallen him ?

Serv. Not that I know of.

Prom. But perhaps he was poor, or despised by all, or disappointed in love, or out of favour at Court ?

PHILOSOPHER AND A METAPHYSICIAN 151

Serv. On the contrary he was very rich, and generally esteemed: love did not trouble him, and he was a great favourite at Court.

Prom. What, then, induced him to commit so desperate an act?

Serv. He was weary of living—so he says in the letter which he has left behind him.

Prom. And what are these officials doing?

Serv. They are inquiring as to my master's sanity; for if he was not mad, his property falls to the Crown; and, indeed, it will certainly do so.

Prom. But tell me, had he no friend or relative to whom he could have committed the care of these children, instead of killing them?

Serv. Yes, he had; and among others one with whom he was very intimate, and to whom he has commended his dog*.

Here Momus was beginning to congratulate Prometheus upon the good effects of civilisation, and upon the happiness which it confers upon human life; and would further have reminded him that no other animal but man kills itself voluntarily, or murders its offspring: but Prometheus stopped him, admitted that he had lost the wager, and paid it to him; leaving the two remaining parts of the world unvisited.

DIALOGUE BETWEEN A NATURAL PHILOSOPHER AND A METAPHYSICIAN

N. P. Eureka, Eureka!

M. What is it? What have you found?

N. P. The art of living long.

M. And that book you carry?

* This incident is true.

N. P. Expounds the art: and through this discovery, if others shall live a long time, I shall live certainly for ever; I mean that I shall acquire by it immortal glory.

M. Take my advice. Get a small casket of lead, shut that book in it, bury it, and before you die remember to leave record of the spot, so that the book may be brought forth when the art shall be discovered of living happily.

N. P. And in this way?

M. In this way your book will be worth nothing. I would value it more if it contained the art of living but a short time.

N. P. That has been already known some few years; and it was not difficult to discover.

M. At any rate, I esteem it more than yours.

N. P. Why?

M. Because if life is not happy, as until now it has not been, it is better for us to have it short than long.

N. P. Oh, not so: for life in itself is good, and every one loves and desires it naturally.

M. So men think, but they deceive themselves: as the vulgar are deceived in thinking that colours are qualities of objects, which they are not, but of the light. I say that man does not desire and love anything but his own happiness. Therefore he does not love life except in so far as he reputes it the instrument or subject of this happiness. So that properly he loves this and not that, altho' he very often attributes to the one that love which he bears to the other. It is true that this illusion and that as to colours are both natural: But as proof that the love of life in man is not natural, or let us say not necessary, think what numbers in ancient times elected to die having choice of life; and very many in our own age have wished for death in various cases, and some kill themselves with their own hands. Cases that could not occur if the love of life in and for itself were of the very nature of man. Thus, it being the nature of every living thing to love its own happiness, sooner would perish the world than any one cease to love and

pursae this in his own mode. So then, that life in itself is good I expect you to prove to me, with reasons either physical or metaphysical of whatever school. For me, I say that happy life would without doubt be good ; but strictly as happiness, not as life. Unhappy life, in so far as it is unhappy, is not good ; and seeing that nature, at least the nature of man, rules that life and unhappiness cannot be disjoined, you may yourself infer what follows.

N. P. Pray let us leave this matter, which is too melancholy ; and without such subtleties answer me sincerely : If man lived and could live for ever—I mean without dying, and not after death—do you believe that he would not be glad ?

M. To a fabulous pre-supposition I must answer with a fable ; so much the more that, having never lived for ever, I cannot answer from experience ; nor have I even spoken with any immortal ; and except in fable I find no account of any such person. Were Cagliostro present, perhaps he could give us a little light, having lived many ages : although, as he afterwards died like the others, it does not appear that he was immortal. I will say, then, that Chiron, who was a god, in course of time grew weary of life, received permission from Jove to be able to die, and died. Now think, if immortality fatigues the gods, what it would do to men. The Hyperboreans, a people unknown but famous, to whom none can penetrate, either by land or by water, rich in every good thing, and especially in most beautiful asses, of which they are wont to make hecatombs, having it in their power, if I do not mistake, to be immortal, for they have neither infirmities, nor fatigues, nor wars, nor discords, nor famines, nor vices, nor errors, nevertheless all die : for at the end of a thousand years or so of life, sated with the earth, they leap voluntarily from a certain cliff into the sea and so drown themselves. Add this other fable. Biton and Cleobis, brothers, on a day of festival, the mules not being ready, having attached themselves to the car of their mother, who was priestess of Juno, and drawn her to the temple ;

she supplicated the goddess to recompense the piety of her children with the greatest blessing that could befall men. Juno, instead of making them immortal as she could have done, and as was then quite usual, made the one and the other die very gently in that same hour. A like thing befell Agamedes and Trophonius. Having finished the temple of Delphos, they besought Apollo to repay them; and he responded that he would satisfy them within seven days, during which time they should give themselves to revel with their substance. The seventh night he sent them a sweet sleep, from which they have yet to awake; and having got this, they demanded no further reward. But since we are among the fables, here is another for you, concerning which I will propound you a question. I know that now you and those like you are firm in the opinion that human life, in whatever region dwelling, and under whatsoever sky, lasts naturally, excepting slight differences, the same number of years, taking each people in the gross. But some worthy ancient recounts that the inhabitants of certain parts of India and of Ethiopia do not live beyond forty years; who dies at this age, dies very old; and the girls of seven years are ripe for marriage. Which last point we know is not far from the truth in Guinea, in the Deccan, and in other regions of the torrid zone. Now, pre-supposing for true that there are one or more nations, the individuals of which as a rule do not exceed forty years of life; and that this is by nature, and not as is believed of the Hottentots through other causes: I ask you whether in this respect it appears to you that the said nations should be more miserable or more happy than others?

N. P. More miserable without doubt, arriving at death more quickly.

M. I believe the contrary for the very same reason. But this is not the point. Give a little attention. I denied that mere life—that is to say, the simple sentiment of one's own existence—is a thing lovable and desirable by nature. But that which perhaps more worthily has also the name of life, I mean the vividness

and abundance of sensations, is naturally loved and desired by all men : because any action or passion whatever, intense and strong, so that it be not irksome or painful, by its sole intensity and strength is agreeable to us, even if lacking every other delightful quality. Now in a species of men, the life of whom should consume itself naturally in the space of forty years, that is in half the period destined by nature to other men ; such life in each of its moments would be twice as vivid as ours : because they, growing and arriving at maturity, and similarly fading and perishing in half the time, the vital operations of their nature, proportionately with this celerity, would be in each instant twice as strong as those which occur in others ; and so, too, the voluntary actions of those men, the extrinsic mobility and vivacity, would correspond to such greater efficacy. So that in a smaller space of time they would have the same amount of life that we have ; which life, being thus distributed throughout a smaller number of years, would suffice to fill them, or would leave only little voids, while it does not suffice for a period as long again : and the acts and sensations of those, being stronger, and, gathered into a smaller circle, would be almost sufficient to occupy and vivify the whole of their existence ; whereas in ours, which is much longer, there are very frequent and long intervals void of any vivid action or affection. And since not mere existence, but only happy existence, is desirable, and the good or bad fortune of any one is not measured by the number of his days, I conclude that the life of those nations, which in so far as it is more brief must be less poor in pleasure, or in what is called by the name of pleasure, should be preferred to our life, and also to the life of the first Kings of Assyria, of Egypt, of China, of India, and of other countries, who lived, to return to our fables, thousands of years. Therefore, not only do I care nothing for immortality, and am content to leave it to the fishes, on which Leeuwenhoek confers it, provided that they are not swallowed by men or by whales ; but instead of retarding or interrupting the opera-

tions of our body in order to prolong life, as Maupertuis proposes, I would that we were able to accelerate them until our life should be reduced to the measure of that of certain insects, called ephemeræ, of which it is said that the oldest do not exceed the age of one day, and nevertheless die great-grandfathers and great-great-grandfathers. In which case I judge that there would remain to us no time for tedium. What think you of this reasoning?

N. P. I think that you will not persuade me; and that if you love metaphysics, I apply myself to physics; I mean that if you look for the subtle, I look at the whole, and am contented therewith. Therefore, without putting hand to the microscope, I judge that life is fairer than death, and to life award the apple, not caring to consider either of them too curiously.

M. So also judge I, but when I remember the custom of those barbarians, who for each unhappy day of their life threw a black pebble into a quiver, and for each happy day a white one: I think what a small number of the white was probably found in the quiver at the death of each, and what a great multitude of the black: and I should like to see here all the pebbles of the days I have yet to live, and sorting them, be able to throw away all the black and remove them from my life, reserving only the white; although I am well aware that they would not make a large heap, and that their whiteness would not be pure.

N. P. Many, on the contrary, even were all the pebbles black, the blackest that could be, would wish to be able to add to them, although more of the same colour: because they hold it for certain that no pebble is so black as the last. And such people, among whom I reckon myself, will in effect be able to add many pebbles to their life in using the art which is expounded in this book of mine.

M. Let each one think and act according to his nature; and death also will not fail to act in his own fashion. But if you would in prolonging life be really useful to men, discover an art by which their sensations and actions shall be multiplied in number and

vigour. You will thus veritably increase human life ; and filling those interminable spaces of time in which our existence rather endures than lives, you may justly boast that you prolong it. And this without going in search of the impossible, or using violence to nature, but indeed seconding her. Does it not appear to you that the ancients lived more than we live, even granting that through the grave and continual perils they were accustomed to run, they commonly died earlier ? And you will thus confer the greatest boon upon men : whose life was always, I will not say more happy, but so much the less unhappy, the more powerfully agitated, and in greater part occupied, without suffering or inconvenience. But full of leisure and tedium, which is as much as to say vacant, it gives us cause to believe true that saying of Pyrrho, that there is no difference between life and death. The which if I believed, I swear to you death would terrify me not a little. But in fine, life should be vivid ; that is, true life ; else death surpasses it incomparably in worth.

DIALOGUE BETWEEN TORQUATO TASSO AND HIS FAMILIAR SPIRIT *

Spirit. How are you, Torquato ?

Tasso. As a man must be, when he is in prison and up to the neck in woes.

Spirit. Courage ! After supper is not the time for lamentation. Cheer up, and let us laugh together.

* During the period of his insanity Tasso believed, like Socrates, that he was visited from time to time by a good and friendly spirit, with whom he used to hold many and long conversations. This we are told by Manso, in his life of Tasso, who was himself present, as he assures us, at one of these colloquies or soliloquies, whichever they should be called.

Tasso. I am little in the humour for that ; but your presence and words always console me. Sit here beside me.

Spirit. Sit down ! That is not so easy for a spirit. But no matter : you can imagine I am seated.

Tasso. Oh, that I might once more see my Leonora ! Every time that I think of her I feel a tremor of joy which thrills through me from head to foot, and affects every nerve and vein in my body. Sometimes, when I think of her, certain phantasies and emotions revive within me, and I seem to become again for a time that same Torquato which I was before I had gained experience of misfortune and mankind, and for whom I now mourn as one mourns for the dead. In truth it seems that acquaintance with the world and the endurance of suffering are wont to suppress and deaden within one the natural man. From time to time it arouses itself for a little while ; but ever more rarely as the years increase ; and ever retires further than before into one's inner being, and falls into a deeper slumber ; until at last, even while one continues to live, it dies. It is marvellous that the thought of a woman should have so much power to revive my soul and make me forget my calamities. And were it not that I cannot hope to see her again, I should not even now despair of ever again being happy.

Spirit. Which do you account the greater pleasure, to see the beloved one, or to think of her ?

Tasso. I do not know. She seemed indeed to be a woman when she was present ; absent, she seemed and seems to me a goddess.

Spirit. These goddesses are so benign that in the presence of mortal men they lay aside their divinity and take off their aureoles, for fear of dazzling or blinding their adorers.

Tasso. What you say is only too true. But does it not seem to you a great fault in woman that they prove so different in reality from what we had imagined them ?

Spirit. I don't think they ought to be reproached

for being made of flesh and blood instead of ambrosia and nectar. Is there anything in the world which has even a shadow or a thousandth part of the perfection which you imagine women to possess? It is strange to me that while you do not marvel that men are men—that is to say, creatures worthy of little praise or love—you are yet unable to comprehend how it is that women are in fact not angels.

Tasso. Say what you will, I am dying with desire to see her again and to speak with her.

Spirit. Be comforted : this very night in a dream she shall appear to you beautiful as youth, and so affable that you will be able to converse with her much more freely and with more frankness than ever you did formerly. Before she leaves you, you shall press her hand ; and she, looking intently at you, shall infuse into your soul a bliss beyond measure ; so that to-morrow, whenever you recall this dream, your heart will leap with tenderness.

Tasso. A fine consolation indeed ! a dream in exchange for the truth.

Spirit. What is truth ?

Tasso. Pilate was not more ignorant on the subject than I am.

Spirit. Well, I will answer for you. Know that between the truth and a dream the only difference is that the latter is often a much finer and more beautiful thing than the former can ever be.

Tasso. Then a pleasure only dreamed of is just as solid as a real pleasure ?

Spirit. It is so. Indeed, I have heard of one who, whenever he dreams of the lady he loves, avoids meeting or seeing her all the next day, because he knows that she cannot compare with the beautiful image of his visions, and therefore the sight of her would destroy all the pleasure he derives from the remembrance of the ideal being created by his imagination. Therefore I do not find fault with the ancients, who were much more curious, skilful, and industrious than you in all that relates to the promotion of every pleasure possible to human nature, for seeking in various ways to enjoy

to the utmost the sweetness and delightfulness of dreams. Nor is Pythagoras to be blamed for having prohibited the eating of beans because of their being apt to produce a troubled sleep and unpleasant dreams. And I would not censure even those superstitious persons, who, before retiring to rest, were accustomed to pray and pour libations to Mercury, the governor of dreams, to send them happy ones; for which reason also they used to carve the figure of that god on the foot of their bedsteads. Thus that happiness which was denied to them in their waking hours they sought to obtain in sleep; and I believe that they obtained their object, at least in part, and that their prayers to Mercury were listened to more favourably than those which they addressed to the other gods.

Tusso. Since men are born and live solely for pleasure of the mind or body, and this pleasure is to be found solely, or for the greater part, in dreams, it follows that we should live for the sake of dreaming, a conclusion which I find it hard to accept.

Spirit. You have already accepted it, since you live and are willing to go on living. What is pleasure?

Tusso. I have not had enough experience of it to know what it is.

Spirit. No one knows it by experience, but only by theory; for pleasure is a theoretic and not a real object—a desire, not a fact—a sentiment conceived in thought, but never realised in deed; nay, rather a conception only, and not even a sentiment. Do you not perceive that in the very moment of enjoying a pleasure, even though it may have been infinitely desired and pursued with many pains and difficulties, your mind is still unsatisfied with it and constantly looks forward to the attainment of some greater delight? It is in this expectation, indeed, that all pleasure consists, and thus it is a mirage which melts away when you think you have attained it. You gain nothing from it but the delusive hope that at some future time you will arrive at that complete felicity which for ever eludes you; though you may on some occasions attempt to persuade your friends that you have enjoyed it, not

altogether from vanity, but that you may, as far as possible, deceive yourself in the same way. Therefore, whoever consents to live really makes this dream his object in life ; that is, he believes that he has enjoyed or will enjoy complete happiness, both of which persuasions are false and fanciful.

Tasso. Is it possible that men can ever believe in present enjoyment?

Spirit. If they could believe this they would, in fact, be happy. But tell me ; do you ever remember saying in any moment of your life, with full sincerity and conviction, ' I am happy ? ' I do not doubt that you have often said, and said sincerely, ' I shall be happy ' ; and sometimes, though less sincerely, ' I have been happy.' Pleasure is always a thing of the past or future ; never of the present.

Tasso. Which is as much as to say that it does not exist.

Spirit. So it appears.

Tasso. Even in dreams?

Spirit. Not even in dreams.

Tasso. And yet the leading object of our life—if not the sole one—is pleasure, by which I mean happiness, which must in effect be pleasure, whatever cause it springs from.

Spirit. Assuredly.

Tasso. Wherefore our life, never attaining its object, must always be imperfect ; and hence living is, in its inmost nature, a state of unhappiness.

Spirit. Perhaps.

Tasso. I see no perhaps in it. But then, why do we live? Or, rather, why do we consent to live?

Spirit. What do I know about that? It is a question which you men ought to be able to answer for yourselves.

Tasso. For myself I swear I do not know.

Spirit. Question those wiser than yourself, and perhaps you may find someone who will give a satisfactory answer.

Tasso. I will. But certainly this life that I lead is altogether unhappy, for, leaving my other sufferings out of account, its tedium alone is killing me.

Spirit. What is tedium?

Tasso. That question I can answer from experience. Tedium is like air, which fills up all the spaces between material things and all the voids in the things themselves. When one thing is removed without its place being filled by another, air immediately occupies the vacancy. In the same way the intervals in human life between pleasures and pains are occupied by tedium. And therefore, as in the material world, according to the Peripatetics, there is no vacuum, so in our life there is no vacuum, except when from any cause the mind's power of thinking is suspended. At all other times the mind, considered apart from the body, is occupied with some passion or sentiment; failing which it becomes full of tedium, which also is a passion no less than suffering or delight.

Spirit. And as all your pleasures are like spiders webs—thin, fragile, and transparent—tedium everywhere invades them, as the air the webs, and shows their emptiness. In truth, I believe that tedium means nothing more in reality than that craving for happiness which pleasure cannot satisfy, nor misery altogether extinguish. And since that craving can never be gratified, it follows that there is no such thing as unalloyed pleasure. Suffering and tedium, in fact, are the stuff of which human life is made up, and a man only escapes from one of them to become the prey of the other. This is the destiny of all mankind, and not of you alone.

Tasso. What remedy is there against this tedium?

Spirit. Sleep, opium, and suffering. But the last is the most powerful, because he who suffers never feels tedium.

Tasso. Rather than have recourse to such a remedy I prefer to endure tedium all my life. But yet it seems to me that man's lot is at least rendered endurable by variety of action, occupation, and sensation, though it is true that these things cannot altogether deliver us from tedium, because they can give us no true delight. Whereas in this prison, deprived of the society of my fellows, not even allowed to write,

reduced to listen to the tickings of the clock, or to count the planks, cracks, and worm-holes of the floor, or to gaze upon the pavement stones in order to pass the time ; while for amusement I must watch the moths and gnats flitting about my cell—passing, I say, all my time like this, I have nothing which can relieve me from the burden of tedium.

Spirit. Tell me, how long have you suffered thus ?

Tasso. Several weeks, as you are aware.

Spirit. Have you felt any variation in the degree of tedium which you have experienced since you first came here until now ?

Tasso. Yes ; I felt it much more at first ; but now my mind, not occupied with anything else, and with nothing to distract it, has grown accustomed to commune with itself more freely and with greater pleasure than before ; it has acquired a habit and a power of talking or chatting to itself, so that often it almost seems to me that I have a number of persons in my head conversing ; and every subject, no matter how trifling, is now sufficient to give rise to a long colloquy between me and myself.

Spirit. You will find that this habit will so grow upon you from day to day, and gain so great a hold upon you, that when you are once more allowed to converse with other men you will seem to yourself less profitably occupied than when alone. And do not think that this result, under the same conditions, is only wrought in persons like yourself, who are accustomed to meditation ; since it takes place, sooner or later, in everyone. Moreover, the being secluded from men and from all exterior life, brings this advantage with it : that a man, even if his experience has sated and disgusted him with the world, now that he is removed from it forgets its many failings, and begins to look upon it with an indulgent eye. He recreates it, as it were, according to his fancy ; so that it appears to him much more attractive and desirable from afar than it did when he was free to join in its affairs ; he forgets the vanity and misery of it ; he begins to form and create a world of his own ; and he

once more loves, desires, and prizes life, even as he did in his youth, and nourishes and pleases himself with the thought of future happiness ; unless, indeed, he has lost all expectation of ever regaining his liberty. So that solitude, as it were, performs the office of youth ; or at least rejuvenates the mind, and strengthens and revives the imagination. It renews in the man of experience that hopeful buoyancy of spirit which properly belongs only to early inexperience. But now I will leave you, for I see that you are growing sleepy, and I have to prepare that beautiful dream which I promised you. Thus, between dreams and phantasies, your life shall pass away, without any other benefit from it than that of passing it away, for that is the only profit that can be obtained from it, and the only object you should propose to yourself on awaking every morning. Long have you held on to life, as it were, with your teeth : happy will be the day when you can end it or when death releases you from it. But know for your comfort that time does not pass more wearily in your dungeon than in the halls and gardens of your oppressor. Farewell !

Tasso. Farewell ! But listen : your conversation comforts me not a little. Not that it dissipates my sadness, which resembles most often a very black night without moon or stars ; but while you are with me it is softened into the dusk of the twilight, of which the gloom is rather grateful than oppressive. Therefore, in order that I may summon you or find you when I want you in future, tell me where you usually dwell.

Spirit. What ! Don't you know that ? In some generous liquor.

DIALOGUE BETWEEN NATURE AND AN ICELANDER

AN Icelandic who had travelled over the greater part of the world, and dwelt in many countries, was once wandering in the heart of Africa, and crossed the Equator in a district which had never before been visited by man. There an adventure befell him, not unlike that which happened to Vasco de Gama, who, when he was doubling the Cape of Good Hope, beheld the said Cape, guardian of the Austral seas, come towards him in the form of a giant in order to dissuade him from entering those unknown waters*. The Icelandic saw in the distance a huge bust, which he at first thought must be of stone, like the lonely colossal figures which he had seen many years before in the Isle of Pasqua. But drawing near he discovered that it was the body of a woman of huge proportions, who was seated on the ground, the upper part of her form resting against a mountain. He found that it was no statue, but a living woman, with a countenance at once beautiful and terrible, with eyes and hair of raven blackness. She looked upon him intently and for some time without speaking; but at length addressed him thus:

Nature. Who are you? and what do you seek in these regions where men have never before been seen?

Icelandic. I am a poor Icelandic fleeing from Nature; and having fled from her all my life in almost every region of the earth, I am now seeking to escape from her in this.

Nat. So flies the squirrel from the rattlesnake, only to fall in its terror into the jaws of its enemy. I am she from whom you fly.

Icel. Nature?

Nat. None other.

* Camoens' *Lusiad*, canto 5.

Icel. It grieves my very soul to hear it; for I am sure that no worse calamity could overtake me.

Nat. You might well have thought that I should be found here, where you can hardly be ignorant that my power is more manifest than elsewhere. But for what cause do you fly from me?

Icel. You shall hear. In my earliest youth, after a very little experience of the world, I became convinced of the vanity of life and the folly of mankind. I saw men striving continually with each other to gain pleasures which do not delight and possessions which are useless to them, enduring and inflicting upon one another innumerable pains and evils, which, unlike their pleasures, are real and positive; and, to sum up all, that the more eagerly they sought for happiness the further they were from its attainment. For these reasons, renouncing all other desires, I resolved to live a tranquil and obscure life, doing harm to no one, not striving to advance my fortune, nor contending with others in any way, or for anything. Despairing of happiness as of a thing alien to man's nature, I proposed to myself no other aim than to avoid suffering. Not that I thought of abstaining from bodily labours or useful work; for there is as much difference between fatigue and pain as between a tranquil and an idle life. But when I began to put into practice this resolution, I quickly learnt by experience how vain it is to hope to avoid being injured by others, however careful one may be to give them no cause of offence, going so far even as to yield spontaneously to all their demands and contenting one's self with what is least desirable in all things. Such concessions are useless to secure one the enjoyment of the humblest station in life, or to prevent one's possession of anything, of however little value, from being contested. However, I easily freed myself from the injuries of men by removing from their society, which in my native island may be done without difficulty. Living in solitude, and almost without a shadow of joy, I yet found that I could not exist without suffering, because the length of the winter, the intensity of the cold, and the extreme heat of the summer,

which are characteristic of that region, continually tormented me; while the fire, close to which I was compelled to spend much of my time, parched my flesh, and the smoke of it injured my eyesight; so that neither indoors nor out could I save myself from perpetual discomfort. It was, in short, impossible for me to attain that tranquillity of life which was my principal desire; for the terrible tempests by sea and land, the rumblings and threatenings of Mount Hecla, and the dread of fires, which, in habitations made of wood, like ours, are constantly occurring, never ceased to perturb me. Such trials as these, which are borne with comparative ease when the mind is occupied with the duties of social and civil life, or distracted by the bustle of passing events, assume a much graver and more serious aspect in a life of solitude, in which nothing is sought for but peace and quiet. Seeing thus that the more I restricted, or rather contracted, myself within myself in order that I might not give offence or do harm to anyone or anything in the world, the less was I able to protect myself from the discomforts and misfortunes which I have mentioned, I resolved to change country and climate, to see whether in any part of the world I could find a place where, offending none, I could live without being offended, and where, if I could not hope to be happy, I might at least exist without suffering. Another reason which urged me to this course was an idea that it might be your will that the human race should inhabit only one part of the globe, which alone was fitted for their habitation, in the same way that you have restricted many kinds of animals and plants to certain districts, out of which they cannot prosper; so that if men, contrary to your design, persisted in going beyond the bounds which you had assigned to them, their sufferings should be imputed not to you, but to themselves. Therefore I have searched everywhere, and explored nearly every country, always keeping to my resolution to do no injury to other creatures, or the least possible, and to seek nothing for myself but a tranquil life. But I have been burned with heat in the tropics,

benumbed with cold in the Arctic regions, afflicted in the temperate zones by the inconstancy of the weather, and troubled everywhere by elemental commotions. I have been in many places in which not a day passes without a storm, which means that every day you make an assault upon those who live there, and who have never done you any injury. In other parts the usual serenity of the sky is balanced by the frequency of earthquakes, by the number and violence of volcanoes, and by continual subterranean commotions; winds and furious hurricanes devastate the regions which are free from other scourges. Sometimes I have found the roof giving way over my head, because of the great burden of snow upon it; at other times such torrents of rain have descended that the saturated earth has given way beneath my feet; and often I have had to flee for my life from the floods which pursued me as if I had done them some injury. Wild beasts, to whom I had not given the least provocation, have attempted to devour me; serpents have tried to poison me; and I have narrowly escaped from being consumed by noxious insects. I do not speak of the infinite number of perils by which man is every day menaced; so that an ancient philosopher* could find no better remedy against fear than the consideration that everything is to be feared. Disease also has assailed me, although I have ever been, as I am still, not merely temperate, but self-denying in all the pleasures of the senses. I marvel much when I consider that you have infused in our constitution so strong, so insatiable a desire for pleasure that our life, deprived of it, is abortive and imperfect, while ordaining at the same time that the indulgence of this desire shall be, of all things human, the most hurtful to the health and strength of the body, the most calamitous in its general effects, and the greatest enemy to the duration of life itself. Although I abstained from almost all pleasures, I have not been able to avoid suffering from many maladies, some of which have threatened my life, others the loss

* Seneca, *Nat. Quæst.*, vi. 2.

of a limb, thus rendering my existence still more unhappy; and all alike oppressing mind and body for days or months with countless pangs and sufferings. And although all men experience in the time of sickness new and unusual evils and additional torments (as if life at its best was not sufficiently calamitous), you have not given to man, in compensation for this, any periods of exceptional and extraordinary good health, from which he might derive some unalloyed pleasure. In regions where the ground is generally covered with snow I have been nearly blinded, a thing of ordinary occurrence among the Laplanders. The sun and air, things necessary and vital to our life, and from which, therefore, we cannot escape, harass us continually --the one by its heat and even its light, the other by its humidity or its rigours; so that a man can never remain exposed to the effects of either of them without suffering more or less inconvenience or harm. In short, I cannot recollect a single day of my life which was free from suffering; whereas those which were passed without the shadow of enjoyment are numberless. Therefore I am forced to conclude that you are the manifest enemy of mankind, of other animals, and of all your works; since I perceive that suffering is as much our destined and inevitable fate as unhappiness, and that a tranquil and peaceful life is as impossible as an unquiet one without misery; for now you ensnare us, now threaten us, now sting us, now smite us, now rend us, and always in some way injure or persecute us. By habit or by destiny you are the implacable enemy of your own flesh and blood, the executioner of your children. Therefore I have ceased to hope; for though men persecute no longer those who fly from them, or hide from them, you, without reason, never cease to pursue us until you have finally destroyed us. Already I am approaching the bitter and sorrowful period of old age, in itself a true and manifest evil, or rather an accumulation of the worst evils and miseries; evils, moreover, not accidental, but destined by you to afflict all living creatures, foreseen by all of us even from childhood, and from our fifth lustrum onwards

ever making itself more and more apparent by a gradual process of decay which we are powerless to arrest ; so that scarcely a third of the life of man is devoted to his time of growth and vigour, but a few instants to maturity and perfection, and all the rest to the decline of his mental and physical powers and the ills resulting from it.

Nat. Do you imagine that the world was created solely for you? Let me tell you that in my works, my laws, and my processes, with rare exceptions, I had and have regard to quite other considerations than the happiness and unhappiness of mankind. If I injure you in any way, or by any means, I am not aware of it, or very seldom ; nor, if I delight or benefit you, am I conscious of it. I have not made, as you believe, such and such things, nor do I perform such and such actions, for your pleasure or profit. And finally, if by some accident I happened to destroy all your race, I should not be aware of the fact.

Icel. Suppose that someone invited me very urgently to pay him a visit at his home, and that I, in order to please him, went there. Imagine, further, that on my arrival he lodged me in a chamber all rent and ruined, where I was in perpetual danger of being crushed by its fall, and that it was, moreover, humid, fetid, and exposed to the wind and rain. Instead of taking trouble to entertain me, or to promote my comfort, he scarcely furnished me with sufficient food to keep me alive ; and moreover allowed me to be insulted, mocked, threatened, and beaten by his children, and the rest of his family. If I complained to him of such bad treatment, he answered : ‘ Have I built this house for you? or do I keep these my children and these my domestics for your service? I have something else to think of than your amusement, or to furnish you with good cheer.’ To this I might reply : ‘ Though you did not build this house for my use, you might at least have refrained from inviting me to visit it. But since I am here because you entreated me to come, ought you not so to arrange that I may

live here without danger or suffering?' So I say now. I know well that you have not created the world for the service of men; I could more easily believe that you have made and disposed it expressly to torment them. Now I ask you: Did I ever beg you to place me in this world? Have I intruded into it violently and against your will? But if of your own will, and without my knowledge, and in such a way that I could not oppose or resist your design, you have placed me here, is it not your duty, if not to keep me contented and happy, at least to provide that my sojourn shall be free from actual pains and sufferings? And I say this, not only on my own account, but on that of the whole human race, and on that of all living creatures.

Nat. It is evident you have not realised the fact that the life of the universe is a perpetual circle of production and destruction, so interlinked that they react continually on each other, thus conserving the existence of the world, which, were either of them to cease to operate, would dissolve into its original elements. Therefore, if man were exempt from suffering, the world itself would be in danger of destruction.

Icel. Yes, that is what all our philosophers say. But since that which is destroyed suffers, and that which destroys does not enjoy, and is soon destroyed itself, tell me what no philosopher can tell me: For whose pleasure or profit does this most miserable life of the universe, which is only maintained at the expense of the suffering and death of all the beings that compose it, exist?

While they were discussing these and similar problems, it is said that two lions made their appearance. They were so faint and emaciated with hunger that they had hardly strength enough to devour the Icelandic; which, however, they managed to do, and so contrived to live at least one day more. But another account contradicts this story, and affirms that a violent wind arose while the Icelandic was addressing Nature, which threw him down and piled above him

a splendid mausoleum of sand. Beneath this, perfectly desiccated, and converted into a beautiful mummy, he was afterwards discovered by certain travellers, who placed him in the museum of some European city, the name of which I have forgotten.

PARINI'S DISCOURSE ON GLORY

CHAPTER I

GIUSEPPE PARINI* was one of the few Italians of modern times who to literary excellence added profundity of thought, and a complete acquaintance with the theory and practice of the philosophy of his period : things so essential to all who aspire to gain a reputation in literature that it would not be possible to understand how those who are without them could expect to succeed in their efforts, if we did not see countless examples of writers who are without those qualities. It is well known also that he was a man of singular honesty, full of compassion for the unfortunate and for his country, faithful to his friends, always high-minded, and ready to meet with unflinching courage the adversities of nature and fortune which afflicted him during the whole of his poor and humble existence, so that it was death alone which at last made him famous. He had several disciples, whom he taught first to gain experience of mankind and of worldly affairs, and then to delight themselves with eloquence and poetry. One of these was a young man of great industry and ardour in literary studies, and of great promise, to whom, not long after he had come under his influence, he discoursed as follows :

* Parini, born 1729, died 1799, was an author whose writings exercised a considerable influence over the mind of Leopardi.

‘You seek, my son, that glory which is alone possible in these days to men of humble birth, namely, the glory which is sometimes to be attained by wisdom, and sometimes by scientific and literary studies. Now you are well aware that this kind of glory, although it was not altogether despised by our great forefathers, was nevertheless held in little esteem in comparison with other kinds of eminence. You know in how many passages, and with what earnestness, Cicero, its most eager and successful votary, excuses himself to his countrymen for the time and labour which he gave to his philosophical and literary pursuits; now alleging that his studies of those subjects were always subordinated to the duties which he owed to the state; and now saying that being compelled by the iniquity of the times to abandon affairs of greater moment, he devoted himself to those studies in order that his leisure might be profitably employed. He always sets the glory which he derived from his consulate and from his labours in the service of the state above that which he gained from his writings. And truly, if the principal subject of literature is human life, and the chief object of philosophy is to guide our actions, it cannot be doubted that action is nobler and worthier than meditation and writing, as the end is nobler and worthier than the means, and things and verities more important than words or arguments. Indeed, nature creates no genius for study or contemplation; man is born to act, and not to write. Thus we see that most of the fine writers, and especially the illustrious poets of the present age (as, for example, Vittorio Alfieri), were at first strongly inclined to great actions; from which, the times being unfavourable to them, or perhaps their want of means compelling them, they turned aside to write great things. Nor have those who have neither the disposition nor the power to do great things the ability to produce great works. And you may observe in our own country, where few indeed are capable of noble deeds, how small in number are those authors who gain enduring fame. I think that antiquity, especially that of Greece and Rome,

may be well compared to that statue which was erected in Argos, of Telesilla, poetess, warrior, and saviour of her country, which statue represented her with a helmet in her hand, looking at it intently and complacently, and as if about to replace it on her head; while at her feet were scattered some volumes, as though neglected by her, because they formed only an insignificant portion of her glory.

‘But among us moderns, who are commonly excluded from every other path to celebrity, those who make letters their object in life, show in their choice the utmost greatness of soul which can to-day be exhibited, and need not apologise to their countrymen. Therefore I have nothing but praise for the magnanimity of your intention. But since this career, not being in conformity with human nature, cannot be followed without injuring the health of the body, nor without adding in various ways to the natural infelicity of the mind, I regard it as my duty, imposed upon me not less by my office than by the great and well-merited affection which I bear towards you, to make you acquainted with the many difficulties which oppose the acquisition of the glory to which you aspire, and the reward which it will give you should you attain it. What I have learned of these by experience and reflection, I will now unfold to you; in order that you may, on the one hand, be able to estimate for yourself the value and importance of the prize, and your chance of obtaining it; and on the other, the fatigues, discomforts, and pains involved in the pursuit (of which I will discourse more particularly on another occasion); so that being fully informed on the matter, you may decide whether it is more expedient for you to persevere in your present course, or to adopt some other profession.’

CHAPTER II

‘I might begin by expatiating at length upon the rivalries, jealousies, bitter censures, calumnies, partialities, the secret and open plots against your

reputation, and the countless other obstacles which the malignity of men will oppose to you in your chosen path. So great is the influence of these hindrances, which are always difficult to surmount, and frequently insuperable, that an author, not only when living, but even after death, is often defrauded of the honour which is due to him. For, having lived in obscurity because of the hatred and envy of his contemporaries, after death he remains obscure because he is forgotten; for it can hardly ever happen that the glory of an author can have birth or resurrection at a time when, beyond his papers lying mute and motionless, there is nothing and no one to call attention to him. But since the difficulties which arise from the malice of men have been abundantly treated of by many authors, to whom you can easily refer, I will not now enlarge upon them, nor will I dwell upon those hindrances which have their origin in the peculiar circumstances of the writer, or even in chance, or some trivial matter; owing to which works worthy of the highest praise and the fruit of infinite labour are not seldom condemned to entire oblivion, or, after having enjoyed a brief popularity, are neglected, and fade utterly from the memories of men; while other writings, inferior in value, or not more excellent, achieve and retain a great reputation. I only desire to reveal to you the troubles and difficulties, which, apart from the malevolence of men, strongly oppose the attainment of literary fame, not in exceptional instances, but usually in the cases of all great authors.

'You are well aware that no one is worthy to be considered a great author, or attains true and lasting glory, save by writing excellent and perfect works, or such at least as in some degree approach perfection. Therefore you should bear in mind a very just remark of one of our Lombard authors* in his *Courtier*:—It is very seldom that one who is not himself an author, however learned he may be, can adequately recognise the art and labour which an author has lavished upon

* Castiglione.

his work, or feel the charm and grace of his style ; and more rarely do we find one who is able to appreciate those subtle and hidden beauties which abound in the works of the ancients. Consider, also, how very few persons are taught or are accustomed to write ; and therefore from what a small minority of mankind, either present or future, you can hope to win that exalted fame which it is your object in life to acquire. And, moreover, you should take into account how great in writings is the importance of style, on the perfection of which depends almost entirely the estimation in which all works coming under the designation of polite literature are ultimately held. And it often happens that if you consider the matter of a famous work apart from its style, you reduce it to a very insignificant thing, although you may have thought at first that its merit consisted in its ideas. Now language is so much an element of style, the two are so inseparably conjoined, that it is difficult to consider the one apart from the other ; in fact, men frequently confound them, not only in talking about them, but even in their own minds ; and as to many of their qualities, whether beauties or defects, they can hardly, or not at all, be distinguished and assigned to one or the other, because they are common to both. But certainly no foreigner is, to use again the words of Castiglione, "accustomed to write" elegantly in your language. It is certain then that style, being so great and so important a part of the art of writing, and a thing so difficult and laborious to acquire in its more intimate and perfect forms, and not less difficult to practise, can only be truly judged and appreciated according to its value by those who are themselves writers and members of the same nationality. For the rest of the human race, the immense trouble and fatigue which the writer undergoes in the formation of his style are in part, and perhaps entirely, wasted and altogether lost. I pass over the infinite varieties of opinion and taste among readers, owing to which the number of those who are capable of perceiving the excellencies of any work of imagination is still further diminished.

'You may hold it as a certainty that in order to understand perfectly the merits of a perfect or nearly perfect work, such as deserves immortal fame, it is not enough to be accustomed to write; it is necessary that you should have almost as great a genius as the author of the work himself. For as you learn to perceive more clearly the qualities which contribute to perfection, and the infinite difficulties which lie in the way of its attainment, you will learn also how to surmount the latter and to reach the former, so that in time there will be little or no difference between appreciation and accomplishment; indeed, they will prove to be one and the same thing. No man is able to discover or relish completely the excellencies of a great writer before he has gained the power of reproducing them in his own works, because such excellencies can only be fully appreciated by means of study and practice, by which they are, so to speak, transfused into himself. Until this comes to pass, no one in truth understands what are the essentials of a perfect style, and without a knowledge of this the great writers can never receive their due meed of admiration. Now, the greater part of those who devote themselves to letters, since they write easily themselves, and believe they write well, must, in fact, consider that it is an easy thing to write well, even though they aver the contrary. Judge, then, how few will be the number of those able to admire or praise you worthily, when you have at last, with incredible labour and pains, produced a great and perfect work. Let me tell you (and you may trust my old age) that in Italy at the present time there are not more than two or three men of supreme excellence in literature. This number may appear to you very small, but, nevertheless, at no time and in no place has it ever been much greater.

'I often wonder to myself how Virgil the supreme example of perfection in writing, acquired his great reputation, and still maintains it. For, although I do not value myself on my superior insight, and in fact believe that I shall never be able to perceive and enjoy all his excellencies and all his sublimity, I am, never-

theless, certain that most of his readers and admirers do not discover in his works one beauty for every ten or twenty which, by long study and meditation, I have found in them. In truth, I am persuaded that the high esteem and respect in which the supreme writers are held is usually the consequence of a blind acquiescence in the verdict of time, even in those who read and study them, rather than a personal judgment formed after discovering and recognising their merits. And I remember that when I read Virgil in my youth, being then quite free to form an unbiassed judgment, and without any care for the opinions of others (a thing which is not at all common), on the one hand ; and on the other, being as uncritical as most young men are, but perhaps not more so than most men remain all their lives ; I say that I then refused to acquiesce in the universal judgment on the poet, not finding in him much greater merit than I found in many mediocre authors. I am even astonished that the fame of Virgil should be greater than that of Lucan. For the mass of readers, not only in ages of false and corrupt taste, but even in those in which a sane and temperate spirit prevails, is much more delighted with gross and patent beauties than with those which are more delicate and less obvious ; it prefers audacity to modesty, the apparent to the real, and, generally speaking, mediocrity to perfection. In reading the letters of a prince of really rare talent, but accustomed to judge of the style of a work by the amount of wit, pleasantry, variety, and acuteness which he found in it, it was easy for me to perceive that in his inmost thought he preferred the *Henriade* to the *Æneid*, though he did not dare to express his opinion, because he feared to offend men's ears with such a verdict. In fine, it astonishes me that the judgment of the few, correct as it is, has prevailed over that of the great majority, and has thus produced a traditional esteem for the great writers which is no less blind than just. That, however, does not always happen ; and I am inclined to think that the fame which is gained by the best authors is the result of chance rather than of their

merits, as perhaps I shall prove in the continuation of my discourse.

CHAPTER III

' We have already seen how few will be capable of appreciating you when you have arrived at that degree of excellence which you aim at. But even in the case of those few, there are many hindrances which may prevent them from forming a just opinion of your worth, although they may see the evidences of it. It cannot be doubted that works of eloquence or poetry, of whatever kind, are judged not so much by their intrinsic qualities as by the effect which they produce in the mind of the reader. So that in judging them, the reader, so to speak, considers them rather in himself than in themselves. Whence it comes to pass that those who are naturally slow of apprehension and cold of heart and brain, though perhaps of good understanding, with much acuteness of mind, and competent learning, are almost wholly unable to appreciate works of imagination; because they are quite unable to enter into the author's spirit, for whom usually they have a feeling of contempt, since, when they read his writings they are unable to discover in what his merit consists, as it affords them no emotional or imaginative delight, nor, indeed, pleasure of any kind. And even those who are by nature disposed to receive and quick to renew within themselves whatever image or sentiment the writer has happily expressed, have many moments of coldness, indifference, languor of mind, and insensibility; moods which, while they endure, render them no more appreciative than those whom I have already mentioned. These moods arise from the most various causes, intrinsic and extrinsic, mental and bodily; some of which are transitory and some lasting. At such periods no one, not even one who is himself a great writer, can judge properly of writings intended to move the heart or the imagination. I will not speak of the satiety which may have been produced in the reader's mind owing to his

having recently perused other works of a similar character; nor of the passions, more or less strong, which from time to time invade the mind, and prevent it from entertaining the emotions which would otherwise be excited within it. Thus, from these or similar causes, we often find that the places, the spectacles, whether natural or artificial, musical compositions, and a hundred other things, which have moved our admiration, or would move it under ordinary conditions, have at such times no power to affect us; although in themselves they are as beautiful as they have always been.

‘But when, from any of the above causes, a man is ill able to appreciate the effects of eloquence or poetry, he does not on that account refrain from passing judgment on the works of those kinds which he then happens to read for the first time. It sometimes happens that I myself take up the writings of Homer, Cicero, or Petrarch, and read them without being in any way moved by their perusal. But, being already assured of the greatness of these writers, not only by their well established fame, but also by experience of the pleasure which I have derived from them at other times, I do not, because of that temporary insensibility, conclude that their reputation is undeserved. The case is different, however, with writings which are read for the first time, and which are too new to have secured such a reputation as to put their merit beyond question. There is then nothing to prevent the reader from judging a book by the effect which it produces on his mind, which, not being then disposed to appreciate the thoughts and images expressed by the writer, is sure to be an unfavourable one, however excellent the work is in reality. Nor is it easy for him to alter his opinion by subsequent readings of the book under more favourable circumstances, because it is likely that the weariness felt in the first reading will extend to other perusals, for who does not know how powerful are first impressions and first conclusions, however false they may be?

‘On the contrary, the reader’s mind is sometimes,

from one cause or another, in such a state of mobility, sensibility, vigour and ardour, or so open and ready, that it responds to the slightest impulse which it receives, feels vividly the least touch, and creates for itself, from some slender suggestion in the book, a thousand emotions and imaginations, which at times cause it to wander in a most delicious ecstasy such as ravishes it quite out of itself. From this it comes to pass that the mind, recalling the pleasure felt during the reading, and confounding the effect flowing from its own happy mood with the merits of the book, conceives for it so great an admiration, and estimates it so highly, that it ranks it above other works much more excellent, but read under less propitious circumstances. You see, then, how uncertain is the judgment of competent persons, even when they seek to form true and just opinions upon the writings of others, with no thought of malice or favouritism. Such and so great is this uncertainty that a man differs widely from himself in the appreciation of writings of equal value; and sometimes the same work will be differently judged by him at different periods of life, or even at different hours of the day.

CHAPTER IV

• ‘You must not think that the above-mentioned difficulties, due to the mental deficiencies of readers, occur rarely or by exception. Consider that nothing is commoner in men as they grow old than for them to lose their taste for eloquence and poetry, no less than for the other imitative arts, and for all natural beauty. Which decadence of the mind, always a natural consequence of age, is now so much greater than it was in other times, commences so much sooner, and progresses so much more rapidly, especially in the studious, in proportion as the experience of everyone is more or less enlarged by the accumulated knowledge and speculations of so many past ages. From which cause, and through the present conditions of civil life,

the dreams of early youth and the aspirations of the mind soon vanish from the imaginations of men, and with them most of the desires and passions which are the motive powers of life. Whence I rather wonder that men of mature age, especially the learned and those accustomed to meditate on human affairs, are still subject to the influence of eloquence and poetry, than that these are sometimes insensible to their beauties. It is certain that a man must believe that there is in life something of beauty and grandeur, and that poetry is not merely fable, in order to be able to appreciate beautiful and grand imaginations. The young always believe these things, even in spite of their reason, until personal experience compels them to know the truth; but they are difficult to believe after the sad lessons of practical life, especially when experience is united with a habit of study and speculation.

‘It would appear from these remarks that the young are generally better judges of works intended to appeal to the emotions and the imagination than are men of mature or advanced age. But, on the other hand, we find that the young, who are not much accustomed to reading, expect from books a super-human delight, infinite and unrealisable; and not finding it they despise all writers. The same thing happens to the illiterate, somewhat later in life, from similar causes. Those youths, again, who are devoted to literature, almost always prefer, both in their own writings and in the writings of others, excess to moderation, the showy or merely pretty to the simple and natural in style, false beauties to true ones; partly from want of experience, and partly because of the natural impetuosity of their age. Consequently the young, who are, without doubt, of all men most disposed to praise what seems to them good, since they are the most truthful and candid, are seldom capable of appreciating the full and mature beauties of great masterpieces. With the progress of the years the aptitude which comes from art increases, while that derived from nature diminishes. Nevertheless, both are necessary if we are to judge truly.

'When one lives in a great city, however warm-hearted and imaginative one may be, I know not how (except one is, like yourself, a lover of solitude) it is possible to receive from the beauties of nature or literature any tender or generous sentiment, any sublime or gracious fancy. For few things are so inimical to the state of mind which makes us capable of appreciating such pleasures as the conversation of the inhabitants, the noise of the streets, the spectacle of the vain magnificence, of the frivolity of mind, the perpetual falsehood, the miserable cares, and of the still more miserable idleness which are found in great cities. As to the mass of men of letters, I venture to say that those residing in them are usually less fitted to pass judgment on books than are those of smaller places; because almost everything in the former being false and vain, its literature also is false and vain, or superficial. And if the ancients accounted the study of science or literature as a recreation in relation to more serious affairs, the majority of those who in the present day profess to be scholars regard and use their literary studies and compositions merely as amusements amongst a variety of amusements.

. 'I think that remarkable works of painting, sculpture, or architecture would be much better appreciated if they were distributed in the provinces among the small or medium-sized towns, instead of being, as they now are, accumulated in the capital cities; in which men are so full of countless thoughts, so occupied with a thousand diversions, that their minds become habituated, or perhaps constrained against their wills, to exhaust themselves in such vanities and frivolities that they are rarely capable of applying themselves to intellectual pursuits. Besides which a large number of beautiful objects, collected together, has such a distracting influence that the mind, paying little attention to them individually, receives no vivid impression, or is filled with such satiety that it contemplates all alike with the indifference with which it views the commonest things. The like is true of music, which in the smaller cities is not so perfectly executed, or on

so large a scale as in the capitals, in which, however, the people are less susceptible to the wonderful influence of that art, and, so to speak, less musical than elsewhere. Without doubt it is necessary to live in a great city in order to acquire perfection in the arts; and still more is it necessary in order that one may labour at the creation of great works; yet it is no less true that the delight which such works give to men is much less there than they would give in other places. And it may be said that artists, working in silence and solitude, strive by vigils, industry, and pains to please men whom the continual noise and bustle of cities has rendered incapable of appreciating, save perhaps in a very small degree, the fruit of their labours. And the fate of the author is in the main similar to that of the artist.

CHAPTER V

‘The last reflections were made rather incidentally than as part of my argument, and I will now return to the consideration of my proper subject. It is a peculiarity of writings which approach perfection that they usually please more on a second reading than they did at first. It is not so with many books, which, being written with art and skill, are yet only of mediocre merit, though they have enough to please on a first perusal, but on a second reading are found to be much less valuable than we had at first supposed. But when read only once the best and the mediocre alike will sometimes deceive even the learned and the expert, so that works of the greatest merit are often rated below those of inferior degree. But you must consider that to-day even professional students of literature can only be induced with much difficulty to read new books a second time, especially those of which the object is to please. This was not so with the ancients, with whom books were not so plentiful as with us. But in the present day, as you know, we are so rich in the writings which former ages have trans-

mitted to us, there are so many nations each of which produces daily an excessive abundance of books, and there is so much intercommunication of ideas between them; there are so many languages, ancient and modern, in each of which are numerous writings on all branches of science and literature, and all these are so closely connected and interlinked that the student must, as far as possible, consult them all; these things, I say, all combine to render it almost impossible for a new book to secure a first reading, let alone a second. Thus, whatever opinion is first formed on a book new to the reader is seldom changed. Add that, from the same causes, even in the first reading of such books, especially if they are of the lighter kind, it is very rare that they are given such a degree of attention and study as is necessary to discover the laborious perfection, the inmost art, the modest and hidden merits which they possess. So that it has come to pass that to-day books of mediocre quality have an advantage over those of superior merit; because their beauties, true or false, are so easily perceived, however trivial they may be, that they cannot fail to be discovered. And it may be truly said that henceforth it will be almost useless to attempt to gain fame by labouring strenuously to produce a perfect work. But, on the other hand, books hastily composed, as nearly all modern ones are, and therefore necessarily imperfect, though they may be popular for a time, soon fall into oblivion, as one sees continually. So much is written nowadays that many works worthy of remembrance, and which indeed have had their hour of celebrity, are swept away by the deluge of new books before they have had time to establish themselves firmly: giving place to others, worthy or unworthy, which also have their brief period of fame. Thus, while one avenue to fame is open to us out of the many which were open to the ancients, even that one is beset with far more obstacles than was formerly the case.

‘Alone in this continual and universal shipwreck of noble and plebeian writings, the books of the ancients

survive ; their fame, established and confirmed by time, causes them not only to be read but to be reread and studied. And note that a modern book, even if equal in merit to an ancient one, could only with difficulty or not at all, I will not say attain the same degree of glory, but give to its readers anything like the same amount of pleasure ; and this for two reasons. The first is that it would not be read with the sedulous care which is bestowed upon writings long celebrated, nor read again save by very few, nor studied by any ; for no modern books are studied except scientific ones. The second is that the durable and universal fame of writings, allowing that at first it sprang only from their own intrinsic merit, nevertheless, having arisen and grown, increases their value, and with it the pleasure of becoming acquainted with them ; indeed, a great part of the pleasure derived from reading them is simply due to their celebrity. And here I am reminded of some noteworthy observations of a French philosopher,* who, discussing the origin of human pleasures, expresses himself thus :—

The mind creates for itself many sources of pleasure, and especially by associating one thing with another. Thus a thing which has once pleased us pleases us again, solely because it pleased us before : our enjoyment is enhanced by the association of the past with the present. For example, an actress who has pleased us on the stage will probably please us in private life : her voice, her declamation, the recollection of the applause she received ; the combination of the part of the princess, which she acted, with her own personality, all together make up a mixture of causes which produce a single pleasure. Our minds are always full of ideas accessory to those which influence them most strongly. A woman with a great reputation and a slight defect can sometimes bring that defect into fashion, and cause it to be regarded as a grace. And most women are loved solely because we are prepossessed in their favour by their good birth, their

* Montesquieu.

riches, or the way in which they are esteemed and honoured by other people.

‘Often, indeed, a woman’s reputation, true or false, for beauty and grace, or even the mere fact that some one else has loved her, will be enough to cause a man to have an affection for her. And who does not know that almost all our pleasures are derived rather from the imagination than from the intrinsic qualities of the objects which please us?’

‘These remarks are as much applicable to writings as to other things, and I say that should a poem appear to-day equal or superior in merit to the *Iliad*, and be read by the best judges of poetry, it would please them much less than that work, and therefore would be much less valued by them; because its real merits would not be enhanced by the fame of twenty-seven centuries, nor by the countless memories and associations which connect themselves with the work of Homer. I say, moreover, that anyone reading carefully *Jerusalem Delivered* or *Orlando Furioso*, not knowing of their great fame, would derive much less pleasure from them than other readers. In short, speaking generally, the first readers of any great work and the author’s contemporaries, supposing that it continues to be famous in after ages, derive the least enjoyment from it; a fact which is extremely discouraging to all who aspire to make themselves famous by authorship.

CHAPTER VI

‘Such are, in part, the difficulties which will obstruct your acquisition of glory among the studious, and among those who are themselves excellent writers and scholars. And as to those who, although sufficiently instructed in those things which are regarded as necessary in a civilised community, yet make no pretence to learning or authorship, and who, if they read at all read only for pastime, you know well that they are incapable of appreciating the real merits of books; and this, not only for the reasons already given, but

for another which I have yet to mention. This is that such persons seek only in what they read the pleasure of the present moment. But the present time is naturally a petty and insipid thing to all men. Even the sweetest things—

Love and slumber, the dance and the song,

as Homer says, quickly and necessarily become tedious if to the present delight there is not added some prospect of a future pleasure which is dependent upon it. Human nature is so constituted that it can only derive a lively pleasure from those things in which hope is an essential element. So strong, indeed, is the influence of hope that many employments, unpleasant in themselves and even disgusting or wearisome, become pleasant and joyful, provided the hope of some good fruit from them is present to the mind ; and conversely things which are accounted delightful in themselves, if not accompanied by hope, become tedious almost as soon as they are tasted. Hence we see that the studious read incessantly, though the works they read are often of the driest character ; and experience a perpetual delight in their studies, which occupy the greater part of their time, because they have ever before their eyes an object to be attained and a hope of some benefit to be derived from their toils. Even when, in their leisure time, they read for diversion, they still endeavour to draw from their reading some kind of profit. Whereas other readers, seeking for no end in their reading save such as is comprised in the act itself, after reading a few pages of any book, no matter how interesting it may be, quickly become tired of it ; and, after taking up a number of others with a like result, express their wonder that anyone can possibly take pleasure in spending so much time in reading a long book. From this, you may see that all the art, industry, and pains of a writer are almost wholly thrown away upon such persons, who nevertheless compose the great mass of readers. And even the studious, changing as the years pass the nature of their studies, can hardly endure to read the books

with which earlier in life they were or would have been delighted beyond measure ; and, though they may still have intelligence and skill enough to know their value, are only wearied by them, because they are now of no practical use to them.

CHAPTER VII

‘ Hitherto we have spoken of literature in general, and more particularly of its lighter kinds, to which you seem to be chiefly attracted. We will now turn to philosophy ; not, however, intending to make a distinction between philosophy and literature, since they are really inseparable from each other. You may perhaps think that philosophy, which is derived from reason, a quality much commoner among men than imagination, or the finer feelings of the heart, ought therefore to be more readily understood, and the value of works upon that subject more easily recognised, and by a greater number of persons, than that of poems and other works dedicated to the beautiful and the pleasurable. In my opinion, however, a taste and feeling for poetry are more common than for philosophy. First, account it certain that subtlety of talent and power of reasoning do not suffice to form a great philosopher ; he must have also a considerable share of imagination. Descartes, Galileo, Leibnitz, Newton, Vico, judging from the nature of their genius, would have made excellent poets ; and, on the other hand, Homer, Dante, and Shakespeare might have distinguished themselves as philosophers. But to treat this matter fully would need much time and many words, and draw us off from our proper subject ; and, therefore, contenting myself with this bare reference to it, I pass on. Only philosophers, I say, can perfectly recognise the value and feel the charm of philosophical works ; that is, of course, the substance of them, and not their adventitious attractions of language or style, or of aught else. Wherefore, as men of an unpoetical nature, though they may indeed

understand the words and the sense of a poem, are yet insensible to its spirit and its imagery ; so also those who are unaccustomed to meditate and philosophise within themselves, or who are incapable of profound thought, are unable to comprehend the truths which the philosopher expounds, however logical his reasonings, however clear his exposition, and however rigorous his deductions, though they may indeed understand the bare meaning of the words which he uses. Because, being without the faculty or the habit of thinking upon the inmost nature of things, or of separating and dividing their ideas into their smallest elements, or to gather and combine a number of these ideas, or to contemplate in one view many particulars so as to draw a generalisation from them, or to follow indefatigably from one to the other a long series of truths, each leading to another truth, or to discover the subtle and recondite relations which each truth has with a hundred others, they cannot easily, or at all, repeat or renew in their own minds the train of thought by which he has reached his conclusions, or experience the impressions which he has experienced ; and yet it is only by such means that they can comprehend or estimate the reasons which led the philosopher to come to this or that conclusion, affirm this or that thing, or doubt such another. So that, although they may understand his ideas, they are unable to judge as to their truth or probability ; because they are unable to test them in any effectual way. And the case is much the same with men of cold temperaments, who are by nature unfitted to appreciate the passion and the imagery of the poet. You know that both the poet and the philosopher are accustomed to sound the depths of human nature in order to bring to light its inmost qualities and modes of acting, and to reveal the causes and effects of its emotions and impulses ; and therefore those who are unable to feel in themselves the correspondence between the thoughts of the poet and the realities of life, are also incapable of estimating or judging the ideas of the philosopher.

From these causes it comes to pass every day that

many excellent works, clear and intelligible to all, are yet interpreted by some as containing a thousand undoubted truths, and by others as containing as many manifest errors ; whence they are attacked, publicly or privately, not only from malignity or interest, or other unworthy motives, but also because of weakness of judgment, or incapacity to feel or comprehend the certainty of their principles, the correctness of their deductions and conclusions, and generally the fitness, the force, and the truth of their reasonings. Often the most admirable works of philosophy are accused of being obscure, not because they are really so, but because of the novelty or profundity of their sentiments, or the inability of the reader to grasp their meaning. You see, then, how difficult it is to win praise for philosophical writings, however much it may be deserved. For you will readily believe, without my taking any pains to prove it, that the number of true and profound philosophers who alone are able to appreciate philosophical works, is very small, even in the present age, though the love of philosophy is more common nowadays than it was in the past. I will not speak of the various factions, or whatever they should be called, into which those who profess to be philosophers are divided now, as they have always been ; each one of which refuses to all the rest the praise and esteem which may be fairly due to them ; not merely from ill-will, but because of the different views which they take of the principles of philosophy.

CHAPTER VIII

‘If then (as there is nothing which I may not promise myself from such talents as yours) it should result from your studies and meditation that it falls to your lot, as it has done in the past to some elect spirits, to discover some cardinal truth, not only entirely unknown, but altogether unexpected and contrary to or diverse from present opinions, you must not look to receive in your lifetime any great honour on account

of it. Rather no praise at all will be given you, not even by the learned (except, it may be, a small minority of them) until that truth, having been repeated now by one, now by another, it enters first the ears of men, and at last their intellects. For no new truth altogether alien to current opinion, even though it may be demonstrated with almost mathematical certainty, can ever be suddenly established in the world, unless it is capable of material proof. It needs time for men to accustom themselves to new ideas; they are ruled by habit and example, and they believe what they have been taught, not what commends itself to their reason; and so it is in everything. Thus it is with most new truths: they are first taught to children, who readily accept them; and at length people are astonished that they were ever doubted, and deride the folly of their ancestors or contemporaries in being blind to such self-evident verities. But according to the greatness and importance of the new truths will be the difficulty of their acceptance, since the greater they are the more destructive they will be to the contrary opinions already rooted in the minds of men. And even acute and practised intellects are not easily convinced of the soundness of the reasons which demonstrate such disquieting truths, especially when they are beyond their knowledge and experience, and run counter to all their beliefs and prepossessions. Descartes, who made many discoveries in geometry, by which its limits were much extended, was not even understood by his contemporaries—a very few of them excepted; and the same was the case with Newton. In truth the condition of men much superior in wisdom to their own time is not unlike that of men of science and learning who live among ignorant and unlettered people; for the latter, as I shall show further on, receive no honour from their fellow-citizens, nor the former from their contemporaries; and it often happens to both that they are vilified because of the singularity of their lives and opinions, or because of the inability of their neighbours or contemporaries to comprehend the value of their works or attainments.

'It cannot be doubted that since the renaissance of civilisation the human race has made continual progress in knowledge. But its progress is slow and measured, whereas the men of supreme and distinguished endowments who devote themselves to speculations upon the sensible and intelligible universe, or to the search for truth, advance with an almost incredible rapidity. But it is not possible for the world, watching their rapid progress, to hasten its steps, so as to keep pace with them, or arrive at the point which they finally attain. In fact, it keeps to its own slow pace, and only arrives at the goal reached by such high spirits an age or several ages after them.

'It is the common opinion that human knowledge owes the greater part of its progress to those great geniuses who arise from time to time like miracles of nature. I believe, on the contrary, that it owes much to men of ordinary talents, and little to those of extraordinary powers. Suppose that one of the latter, having made himself master of all the knowledge of his time, progresses, let us say, ten paces in advance of his contemporaries: most men not only refuse to follow in his footsteps, but ridicule him, even if they do nothing worse. Meanwhile many men of mediocre talents, perhaps availing themselves to some extent of the thoughts and discoveries of the man of genius, but chiefly by means of their own studies, make conjointly a single step forward; in which, because it is but a small advance, and there is no great element of novelty in it, and also from the fact that numerous persons are concerned in the discovery, they are universally followed at the end of a few years. Progressing thus, according to custom, little by little, and by the labour and example of other mediocre intellects, the tenth step is reached, and thus at last the discoveries of the genius are universally accepted. But he, having died long before, does not even acquire a tardy and untimely reputation, either because his memory has already faded from the minds of men, or because the unjust estimate formed of him when living is still strong enough to prevail over every other considera-

tion. Besides, it is not through him that men have at last reached his point of view ; but having reached it, they feel that they are upon a level with him ; nay, they are perhaps superior to him even now. since time has enabled them to demonstrate and elucidate the truths which he seized by intuition, to give certainty to what he only conjectured, and by systematising and putting in order his discoveries as it were to mature them. It is possible, however, that some student of the past in the course of his researches may find how far in advance the genius was of his time, and proclaim his merits to later generations ; but his efforts will excite little notice and will be quickly forgotten.

‘ Although the progress of human knowledge acquires, like a falling body, a greater rapidity every moment, it is nevertheless very seldom that a single generation of men changes its opinions or recognises its errors so completely as to disbelieve to-day that which it received as truth yesterday. Nevertheless it prepares the way for its successor to know and believe many things which are contrary to its own convictions. Just as no one feels the perpetual motion of the earth, which carries us round with it, so mankind in general does not perceive the continual progress of knowledge, nor the ceaseless transformations which its opinions are always undergoing. If a man changes his opinions it is always in such a way that he is able to persuade himself that he has not changed them. But he cannot do this in the case of an opinion or a belief which is altogether at variance with all his preconceived ideas. Therefore it may be said that no such truth, unless it is of a kind which may be made apparent to the senses, will ever be generally believed by the contemporaries of the discoverer.

CHAPTER IX

‘Let us suppose that you have overcome every obstacle, and that, aided by fortune, your merit has been recognised, and you have obtained not only celebrity but glory, and this not after death, but in your lifetime. Let us see what profit you will derive from it. Well, men will desire to see you and to know you personally; you will have the pleasure of being pointed out with the finger; and honour and respect will be shown to you in your presence: these are the greatest benefits which you will gain from your literary glory. It would seem likely that you would gain these honours more easily in a small than in a large city; since the latter are subject to all the distracting influences of power and wealth, and of all the arts which are employed to minister to the entertainment of an idle and pleasure-loving society. But as small cities are usually wanting in the means and aids to study which are found in the larger ones, and as all who gain eminence in arts and letters usually take up their residence in the latter, the former, having few or no scholars among their inhabitants and few or no facilities for study, have little appreciation for knowledge and wisdom, or even for the fame which may be acquired by them, since these are not things for which they themselves have any desire. And if by chance a person, remarkable or even extraordinary for his talents and acquirements, takes up his residence in a small town, the fact of his unique distinction not only does not make him esteemed there, but rather makes him the most obscure and neglected person in the place, no matter how great may be his renown in the world at large. As a man possessing much gold and silver, who lived in a place where these metals were not valued, would not be richer than other people, but really poorer, and generally accounted so; in the same way a man of talent and learning, living in a place where such things are neither understood nor valued, receives no honour on account of them, and a

in fact despised, unless he has other and more material claims to consideration. Even when such a man is reputed to be much more talented than he really is, as sometimes happens, he is not therefore held in any greater esteem. When I was a young man, I used sometimes to revisit my little Bosisio*, where everyone knew that I spent my time in study, and that I was something of an author. In consequence of this the people of that place gave me credit for being a poet, philosopher, physicist, mathematician, doctor, lawyer, and theologian; and they believed me besides to have a knowledge of all the languages in the world. They used to question me on any or all subjects, and always referred to me to settle the disputes that chanced to arise in conversation on points of science or language. And yet they had little regard for me, and thought me inferior to the learned men of all other places. If I gave them reason to think that my knowledge was not so extensive as they fancied, I fell very low in their estimation; and at last they came to think that my learning was not at all greater than their own.

‘As to the great cities, what I have already said will enable you to judge as to the obstacles you will meet with there to the acquisition of glory, and to the enjoyment of the fruits thereof. I will now add that, although no fame is more difficult to merit than that of an eminent poet, an elegant writer, or a philosopher, none is so unprofitable to its possessor. You are not ignorant of the perpetual complaints, both in ancient and modern times, of the poverty and misfortunes of the great poets. Concerning Homer, for instance, all is mystery, both as regards himself and his poetry: his country, his life, his history, are secrets which it seems impossible to penetrate. But in the midst of so many uncertainties and obscurities there is one constant tradition, namely, that Homer was poor and unhappy; it seems as if the memory of the ages was

* Parini's birthplace. Leopardi is thinking all the while of himself and his native place, Recanati.—*Translator.*

determined that it should not be left in doubt that the fate of the first of poets was not less unhappy than that of so many of his successors. But leaving aside the other benefits of glory, and speaking only of the honour to be derived from it, it is a fact that in the commerce of life there is no kind of fame which is less esteemed or less useful to its possessor than that which we are considering. It may be that the number of persons, who obtain it without having merited it, or the great difficulty itself of meriting it, deprive such a reputation of all value or esteem; or it may be that most men of some slight degree of talent have vanity enough to believe that they have, or could easily acquire, the knowledge and ability necessary in order to distinguish themselves in literature and philosophy, and consequently do not acknowledge as much superior to themselves those who are really eminent in those arts: certain it is that from one or all of these causes it results that to have the reputation of being a fairly good mathematician, physicist, philologist, antiquarian, painter, sculptor, or musician, or of being moderately well versed in a single ancient or foreign language, is the means of obtaining from the mass of men, even in the great cities, more honour and consideration than can be obtained by those who are pronounced by good judges to be really supreme artists in their several professions or vocations. Thus the two arts which are the noblest, the most difficult, the most extraordinary and wonderful; the two summits, so to speak, of man's intellectual achievements—I mean poetry and philosophy—are in the present day, in themselves and in their professors, the most neglected faculties in the world. Even the manual arts are esteemed above them; because, among other reasons, no one claims to be proficient in them without having practised them, nor to be able to acquire them without labour and study. In short, the poet and the philosopher receive in life no fruit from their genius, nor any recompense for their studies, except perhaps that their merit is recognised by a very small number of persons. This also is one of the numerous points in which poetry and philosophy

agree—both are, as Petrarch sings, “poor and naked,” not only of all other wealth, but of respect and honour.

CHAPTER X

‘Since you will hardly be able, in your commerce with men, to derive any benefit from your fame, the greatest good you can receive from it will be to meditate upon it and take pleasure in thinking of it in silence and solitude, thus drawing from it stimulus and encouragement to new labours, and making it the foundation of new hopes. For literary glory, like all other human blessings, is sweeter at a distance than when near at hand, and never is in fact present to its possessor, nor can it be found anywhere.

‘Thus you will at length have recourse to that last refuge and comfort of noble minds, posterity. Cicero, rich in glory, not of a common and simple kind, but unusual and multiplex, and such as among the ancient Romans it was fitting for an eminent Roman to attain, turns with longing towards future generations, saying, although in the person of another, “Do you think I could have been induced to undertake so many labours, by day and by night, in peace and in war, if I had not believed that my glory would endure beyond the limits of my life? Were it not much better to live idly and tranquilly, without fatigue or anxiety? But my mind, I know not how, ever urged me to look forward to posterity, telling me that its true life would only begin when life was over.”* Cicero attributes these ideas to that faith in the immortality of the soul which nature has implanted in human breasts. But the true reason is that all the good things of the world are no sooner acquired than they are found to be unworthy of the cares and fatigues with which they have been purchased, especially glory, which, above all others, costs the most, and is of the

* *De Senectute*, cap. 23.

least value to its possessor. But, as Simonides says :—

Fair hope feeds us all
With blissful illusions,
Urging us on to unrequited toil :
One looks for the friendly dawn,
Another awaits the time or the season ;
And no mortal lives
Who does not promise himself
In the years to come,
From Pluto and the other gods
A happy future.

‘ Thus, as we gain experience of the vanity of glory, hope is, as it were, hunted and driven from place to place, until at last, finding in life no resting place, it does not yet despair, but looking beyond death itself, puts its trust in posterity. For the more a man is dissatisfied with his present state, the more will he be disposed to solace himself with the hope of a happy future. Hence those who are desirous of glory, even when they have obtained it in life, dwell chiefly upon that which they hope to possess after death, just as no one is so happy to-day that he does not despise his present happiness and look forward to a happier future, which he will despise just as much when he obtains it.

CHAPTER XI

‘ But what is the value of this appeal which we make to posterity? Certainly the nature of the human imagination is such that the future bears a greater and fairer aspect than the present, so that we conceive of the men of the future as being superior to those of the present, or even those of the past, simply because we can have no knowledge of any kind about them. But judging by reason, and not by imagination, why should we think that those who will come after us will be better than ourselves? I believe rather the contrary, and am disposed to put faith in the proverb that says

that the world grows worse as it grows older. It seems to me that it would be better for men of genius if they could appeal to the dead, who, according to Cicero, were not inferior in number to the men of the future, and much excelled them in virtue. But certainly the most valiant man of the present day would receive no praise from the ancients. Suppose we concede that our descendants, inasmuch as they will be free from emulation, envy, love, and hate, not indeed among themselves, but as regards us, will judge our writings more impartially than our own contemporaries, are they likely in other respects to appraise us more justly? Can we believe, to speak only of letters, that they will have a greater number of excellent poets, of consummate writers, of profound philosophers, since we have already seen that these only can properly estimate their peers? Or will the judgment of these have greater influence on the multitude of their time than has that of ours on the present? Can we believe that in the mass of men, the endowments of the heart, the imagination, and the intellect will be greater than they now are?

‘As regards works of imagination, do we not see in how many ages a false and perverted judgment has reigned? In such times the true excellencies of writing have been despised, the best authors, ancient and modern, have fallen into forgetfulness or contempt, and nothing has been valued save that which was vicious or barbarous in style; that alone being accounted natural and proper, because any style which becomes the fashion, however corrupt, is, for the time the fashion lasts, accounted natural. And all this has happened in ages and among people otherwise refined and noble. What certitude have we that posterity will continue to value those kinds of writing which we ourselves esteem? supposing even that we now value only those which are truly praiseworthy. Nothing is more subject to change than the opinions and the tastes of men as regards the beauties of style: they vary with the times, the nature of places and peoples, customs, usages, and individual likings. Yet

it is to these various and inconstant influences that the glory of writers is necessarily subject.

'The condition of philosophy and the other sciences is even more subject to variation and mutability ; although at the first glance it does not seem so : for whereas the object of the *belles lettres* is the creation of the beautiful, the appreciation of which depends upon custom and opinion, the object of the sciences is truth, which is immutable and always the same. But as this truth is hidden from mortals, save such parts of it as are revealed little by little in the course of time ; it follows that men, in seeking to discover it, lose themselves in guesses and conjectures, and embrace all kinds of false theories, from which are born many schools and sects, all holding contrary opinions. On the other hand, as many new discoveries are made, and new aspects of truth present themselves, its science becomes more and more complex. For this reason, and also because in different ages different opinions, all of which are held to be certainties, prevail, it results that science never rests long in one state, but is continually changing in form and quality. I will pass over the first point, that is the changes of opinion, which are not perhaps less injurious to philosophers and men of science with their contemporaries than with posterity. But how much must this mutability of the sciences and philosophy injure the great reputations which their professors have gained, with future ages ! When, in consequence of new discoveries and new theories, the state of one or the other of the sciences becomes notably different from what it is at present, in what estimation will the writings and the thoughts of those who are now most celebrated in that science, be held ? Who now reads the writings of Galileo ? Yet they were in his own time most wonderful ; nor perhaps could works better, or more worthy of a supreme intellect, or fuller of great and noble conceptions, have then been written on his chosen subjects. Nevertheless every ordinary physicist and mathematician of the present day is the superior in his own science of Galileo. And who now reads the works of Francis Bacon ? Who cares for

those of Malebranche? And even the work of Locke, if the science which he may almost be said to have founded progresses as rapidly as it now seems likely to do, how long will it be before it is altogether neglected?

‘In truth the very strength of genius, industry, and labour, which philosophers and scientists expend in order to establish their glory, are the cause in course of time of the extinction or obscuring of it. For from the discoveries which they make, and by which they become famous, other discoveries arise, so that little by little their fame diminishes and at last falls into oblivion; since it is very difficult for most men to admire in others a degree of knowledge which is inferior to their own. Who can doubt that the next age will have discovered the falsity of many ideas which the wisest of our philosophers now hold to be established truths; or that it will greatly surpass us in its knowledge of the truth?’

CHAPTER XII

‘Finally you will perhaps desire me to give you my opinion and counsel as to whether it will be for your benefit to follow or to avoid the path to that glory, which is of so little use when acquired, and which it is no less hard to retain than to obtain; since it is like a shadow, a thing neither to be felt, nor prevented from escaping from you. I will tell you briefly and frankly what I think about the matter: I consider that the wonderful acuteness and strength of understanding, the nobility, warmth, and fecundity of heart and imagination which you possess, are, of all the qualities which fate can bestow upon humanity, the most dangerous and lamentable which it can receive. But when one has received them, it is almost impossible to escape from their consequences; and for the rest, in these times, almost the only benefit which one can obtain from their possession is this glory which is sometimes the reward of devotion to letters and learning. Wherefore, as those poor wretches who, having

accidentally lost or mutilated a limb, avail themselves of their misfortune, and turn it to profit by exciting the compassion of others, so my advice is that you should by all means endeavour to extract from those your qualities that sole good which they can bring you, notwithstanding its insignificance and uncertainty. Usually, gifts such as yours are accounted benefits of nature ; and those who do not possess them envy those, whether alive or dead, to whom they have been allotted. Which is a thing not less contrary to good sense than if a man sound and whole should envy the bodily calamities of the poor creatures of whom I have just spoken ; as if such mutilations were to be desired because of the paltry alms which they produce. Most men occupy themselves by working as much or as little as they can, and by playing as much as nature permits them ; but great writers are incapable, by nature or habit, of many human pleasures ; they renounce voluntarily many others ; society in general takes no account of them, and they are appreciated only by the few who follow the same studies as themselves ; their destiny is to lead a life which is a living death, and to live, if even this be granted them, when they are in their sepulchre. But man's fate, wherever it may lead him, should be followed with a great and undaunted soul : that is a duty which is demanded from you, and from all who resemble you in virtue and in genius.'

DIALOGUE BETWEEN FREDERIC RUYSCH AND HIS MUMMIES *

CHORUS OF THE DEAD IN THE LABORATORY OF
FREDERIC RUYSCH †

In the world alone eternal, unto whom revolveth
Every thing created,
In thee, Death, reposes
Our naked nature ;
Joyous no, but secure
From the ancient suffering. Profound night
In the confused mind
Obscures grave thought ;
For hope, for desire, the arid spirit
Feels itself void of strength :
And thus from affliction and fear is free,
And the blank slow ages
Consumes without tedium.
We lived : and as confused remembrance
Of terrible phantom
And sweating dream
Wanders in the soul of the suckling child ;
Such memory remains to us
Of our life : but far from fear
Is our remembrance. What were we ?
What was that sharp point
Which had the name of life ?

* See, amongst others, as to these famous mummies, which in scientific language would be termed anatomical preparations, Fontenelle, *Eloge de Mons. Ruysch*. (Author's note.)

† This chorus in the Italian is one of the marvels of literature. Unable to translate it into anything like poetry, and feeling that it could not be left out altogether, I have been reduced to give the baldest literal version ; a version even less like the original than a mummy of Ruysch is like a living man ; for the mummy preserved form with substance, while the version preserves the substance only, and is equally lifeless.

A thing mysterious and stupendous
 Now is life to our thought, and such
 As to the thought of the living
 Unknown death appears. As from death
 Living it drew back, so now draws back
 From the vital flame
 Our naked nature ;
 Joyous no, but secure ;
 For to be blest
 Fate denies to mortals and denies to the dead.

Ruysch (outside the laboratory, looking through the chink of the door). The dence ! who has taught music to these dead, that chant like cocks in the middle of the night ? Truly I am in a cold sweat, and almost more dead than they are. I did not think that because I have preserved them from corruption, they would resuscitate upon my hands. So it is : with all my philosophy I tremble from head to foot. Bad luck to that devil who tempted me to bring them into my house. I don't know what to do. If I leave them shut up here, who knows but they will break open the door, or issue through the keyhole, and come to catch me in bed. I don't like to call for assistance in fear of the dead. Come, let me put on a bold face, and try a little to frighten them.

(Entering.) My children, what game are we playing ? do you not remember that you are dead ? what is this uproar ? perhaps you have got proud through the visit of the Czar *, and fancy you are no longer subject to the old laws ? I suppose you have meant all this for fun, and not seriously. If you are alive again, I congratulate you ; but I am not so rich that I can afford to keep the living as I have kept the dead ; and therefore pray leave my house. If what they tell of the vampires is true, and you are vampires, seek other blood to drink ; for I am not disposed to let mine be sucked, liberal as I have been with that artificial sort

* The collection of Ruysch was twice visited by the Czar Peter the Great ; who afterwards bought it, and had it transferred to St. Petersburg. (Author's note.)

which I have put into your veins*. In brief, if 't please you to continue tranquil and silent as you have been hitherto, we shall remain on good terms, and you shall lack for nothing in my house ; if not, take care lest I seize the bar of the door and kill the whole lot of you.

Mummy. Don't get angry ; for I promise you that we will all keep dead as we are, without your killing us.

R. Then what is this freak you now have of singing ?

M. Shortly since, exactly at midnight, was fulfilled for the first time that great mathematical year, whereof the ancients write so many things ; and this, also, is the first time the dead speak. And not only we, but in every cemetery, in every sepulchre, down in the bottom of the sea, under snow or sand, exposed to the sky, and in whatever place they are, all the dead at midnight have sung like ourselves that little song you have heard.

R. And how long will they continue to sing or to speak ?

M. They have already ceased to sing. They are able to speak for a quarter of an hour. Then they return to silence until the same year shall be again fulfilled.

R. If this is true, I don't think that you will interrupt my sleep another time. But talk together freely ; for I will stand aside here, and willingly listen, through curiosity, without disturbing you.

M. We cannot speak otherwise than answering some living person. One who has not to reply to the living remains quiet, having ended the song.

R. I am really sorry : for I fancy it would be very amusing to hear what you would say among yourselves if you could talk together.

M. Even if we could, you would hear nothing ; for we should have nothing to say to each other.

* The means used by Ruysch to conserve the corpses were injections of a certain matter, composed by himself, the effects of which were wonderful. (Author's note.)

FREDERIC RUYSCH AND HIS MUMMIES 207

R. A thousand questions to put to you come into my mind. But as the time is short, and leaves no space for choice, let me know briefly how you felt in body and mind at the moment of death.

M. I was not aware of the exact moment of death.

The other Mummies. Nor were we.

R. How not aware?

M. For example, as you are never aware of the moment you begin to sleep, however much attention you pay.

R. But falling asleep is natural.

M. And does not dying appear to you natural? Show me a man, a beast, or a plant, that dies not.

R. I no longer wonder that you go on singing and speaking, if you were not aware of death.

Thus he, unaware of the blow, it is said,
Went on fighting, and was dead ;

writes an Italian poet. I thought that as to this business of death those like you would know something more than the living. But then, to be serious once more, did you feel no pain in the instant of death?

M. What pain can that be of which he who suffers it is not aware?

R. At any rate, all are convinced that the feeling of death is most painful.

M. As if death were a feeling, and not rather the contrary.

R. And as well those who concerning the nature of the soul incline to the opinion of the Epicureans, as those who hold the common doctrine, all, or the greater part, concur in what I say ; that is, in believing death to be by its very nature, and beyond all comparison, a most acute pain.

M. Well, you shall question on our part both these and those : if man cannot be conscious of the moment in which the vital operations, in a greater or less degree, are only interrupted, be it through sleep or lethargy or syncope or whatever cause ; how shall he be conscious of that in which the same operations

altogether cease, and not for a short space of time, but for ever? And besides, how can it be that a vivid feeling should exist in death? much more, that death itself should be by its very nature a vivid feeling? When the sentient faculty is not only debilitated and small, but reduced so low that it fails and perishes, do you believe that the person is capable of a strong feeling? much more, do you believe that this very dying out of the faculty of feeling must be a very great feeling? You nevertheless observe that even those who die of acute and painful diseases, upon the approach of death, more or less time before expiring, become so calm and restful, that it may be known their life, reduced to a little, is no longer adequate for suffering, so that suffering ceases before life. So much you shall say on our part to whoever thinks he will have to die with pain in the moment of death.

R. These arguments will perhaps satisfy the Epicureans. But they will not satisfy those who judge differently of the substance of the soul; as I have done until now, and shall do much more in future, having heard the dead speak and sing. Because, believing that death consists in the separation of the soul from the body, they will not comprehend how these two things, conjoined and as it were conglutinated so as both to form one sole person, can be separated without very great violence and unutterable anguish.

M. Tell me: the spirit is perhaps fastened to the body by some nerve, or some muscle or membrane, which necessarily has to be broken when the spirit departs? or perhaps it is a member of the body, so that it has to be torn or cut therefrom with violence? Do you not see that the soul only issues from this body inasmuch as it is prevented from remaining, and has no longer place therein (*è impedita di rimanervi, e non v'ha più luogo*); not at all through any force which tears and eradicates it therefrom? And tell me likewise: does the soul in entering the body feel itself strongly fastened or bound thereto, or, as you say, conglutinated? Wherefore then shall it feel itself un-

fastened in issuing from the body, or, we will say, experience a most violent sensation? Be assured that the entrance and exit of the soul are alike quiet, easy, and gentle.

R. Then what is death, if it is not anguish?

M. Rather pleasure than otherwise. Know that dying, like falling asleep, is not instantaneous but gradual. It is true that the degrees are more or fewer, greater or less, according to the variety of the causes and kinds of death. In the last moment death brings no pain or pleasure whatever, any more than sleep. In the preceding moments it cannot produce pain: for pain is vivid; and the feelings of man in that hour, that is when death has commenced, are moribund, which is as much as to say extremely reduced in force. It may well be cause of pleasure: for pleasure is not always vivid; indeed, perhaps the greater part of human delights consists in some sort of languor. So that the feelings of man are capable of pleasure even when near extinction; for very often languor in itself is pleasure; above all when it frees you from suffering; for you know well that the cessation of any pain or discomfort is in itself pleasure. So that the languor of death ought to be the more agreeable as it frees man from greater suffering. For myself, although indeed in the hour of death I did not pay much attention to what I felt, because the doctors ordered me not to fatigue my brain; I nevertheless remember that the feeling I experienced was not very different from the satisfaction produced in men by the languor of sleep, during the time they are falling asleep.

The other Mummies. We also seem to remember as much.

R. Be it as you say: though all with whom I have had occasion to reason on this matter judged very differently: but, so far as I remember, they did not cite their own personal experience. Now tell me: in the hour of death, while you felt that satisfaction, did you believe yourself dying, and that the comfort was a courtesy of death; or did you imagine anything else?

M. So long as I was not dead, I was never convinced that I should not escape that peril ; and up to the last moment in which I had power to think, I hoped that at the least an hour or two of life remained to me : as I think occurs with many when they die.

The other Mummies. The same occurred with us.

R. Thus Cicero says that no one is so decrepit that he does not hope to live at least another year. But how did you perceive at last that the spirit had issued from the body ? Say : how came you to know that you were dead ? They do not answer. My children, do you not understand me ? The quarter of an hour must be past. Let me touch them a little. They are quite dead again ; there is no danger of their startling me another time : back to bed.

MEMORABLE SAYINGS OF FILIPPO OTTONIERI

I

FILIPPO OTTONIERI, of whom I am about to record some noteworthy remarks, was born and spent most of his life at Nubiana, in the province of Valdivento*, where also he died not long since. Although there is no record of anyone having ever been injured by him, either by act or deed, he was generally hated by his fellow-citizens ; because he seemed to take little or no pleasure in many things which delighted them, notwithstanding that he never censured or condemned others for enjoying those things in which he took no joy himself. It is believed that he was in practice, and not in theory only, what many men of his time professed to be—that is, a philosopher. Wherefore

* Cloud-city in the Valley of the Wind.—*Translator.*

other people felt that he was different from themselves ; although he did not affect to be, or seek to appear, different from the multitude in any way. In regard to which he once remarked that the greatest singularity now displayed by anyone in dress, manners, or actions, if compared with that of those who amongst the ancients were accounted singular, is not only of a different character, but so much less diverse than was that from the ordinary practices of society that it would have seemed to the ancients hardly worthy of notice, even amongst the nations who were most uncultivated and corrupt. And, comparing the singularity of Jean Jacques Rousseau, which excited so much astonishment among his contemporaries, with that of Democritus and the first Cynic philosophers, he said that to-day anyone who lived as differently from the rest of the world as those Grecian philosophers did in their time, would not merely be accounted eccentric or singular, but would be regarded as an outlaw from human society. He added that from the amount of the singularity which may be found in the persons of any country at any one time, the state of the civilisation of that country may be estimated.

In his habits of life, although very temperate, he professed himself to be an Epicurean, perhaps in jest rather than seriously. But he condemned Epicurus ; saying that in his time and nation much greater pleasure was to be derived from the study of virtue and glory than from indolence, indifference, and luxurious living ; in which that philosopher placed the supreme good of human life. He affirmed also that what now passes as Epicureanism differs altogether from the ancient doctrine.

In philosophy it was his pleasure to call himself Socratic ; and often, like Socrates, he passed a good part of the day conversing on philosophical subjects or on whatever matter might present itself, with anyone with whom he might be in company, and especially with certain intimate friends. But he did not frequent, like Socrates, the shops of shoemakers, carpenters,

smiths, or other tradesmen ; for he thought that though the artisans of Athens may have had time for philosophising, those of Nubiana would have been in danger of starvation if they had acted in the same way. Neither did he follow the Socratic manner of discussion ; for he said that though the moderns may be more patient than the men of old, it would not now be possible to find anyone who would submit to be subjected to a thousand consecutive questions, or who would listen to a hundred different conclusions. In reality, he resembled Socrates in nothing, save in his sometimes ironical or equivocal mode of speaking. Regarding the origin of the famous Socratic irony, he said :—

Socrates, born with a soul full of tenderness, and therefore with a great disposition to love, but unfortunate beyond measure in his bodily shape, despaired probably even in his youth of ever inspiring others with any passion towards himself beyond that of friendship, which is not fitted to satisfy an ardent and delicate heart, that feeling within itself much love for others asks for love in return. On the other hand, although he had plenty of that courage which is born of reason, it seems that he was not so well endowed with that which comes by nature, nor with the other qualities which in those times of wars and seditions were necessary to all those who aspired to take part in the public affairs of a people so turbulent as the Athenians. Moreover, his ungainly and ridiculous figure must have been no slight impediment to his popularity among a people who, even in their language, made little distinction between goodness and beauty, and who were so much given to raillery. Thus it was that in a free city, full of tumult, passions, business, pastimes, riches, and all other things, Socrates, poor, unfavoured by love, unfitted for the strife of public affairs, and yet gifted with surpassing genius, which must under these conditions have intensified the sense of his defects, devoted himself to reasoning subtly on the actions, customs, and qualities of his fellow-citizens. The irony which he came to use in his

speech was natural to one who found himself debarred, so to speak, from taking part in the business of life. But the gentleness and magnanimity of his nature, and also the celebrity which he gained by his discourses, and by which his self-esteem must have been in some degree consoled, rendered this irony not disdainful and bitter, but pleasant and smiling.

It was thus that philosophy, to use the famous words of Cicero, was made to descend from heaven, and introduced by Socrates into the city and the household. Its speculations, which until then had been occupied with things occult, were now directed to consider the nature and the lives of men, to discuss the virtues and the vices, and to inquire what things were good and useful, and what otherwise. But Socrates did not at first intend to make this innovation, nor did he set up for a teacher, nor even desire to obtain the reputation of being a philosopher, a title which was then confined to those only who studied physics or metaphysics, and which therefore he could not hope to attain by such discourses and colloquies as those which he indulged in. He made open profession that he knew nothing, and that his object was simply to entertain himself by conversing about human affairs generally; preferring this pastime to philosophy itself, and to all other arts and sciences, since being naturally much more inclined to action than to speculation, he only became a talker because of the difficulties which prevented him from becoming a man of affairs. In his discussions he was always more willing to converse with young and handsome persons than with others; therein, perhaps, following his natural inclination and seeking to gain at least the esteem of those by whom he would much rather have been loved. And since all the schools of Greek philosophy thenceforward were derived in some manner from the Socratic, Ottonieri concluded that the origin of almost all the philosophy of that country, and consequently of all the modern systems which have been founded upon it, were the flat nose and satyr's visage of this great genius and warm-hearted man. He also said that in the books of

the disciples of Socrates his personality is everywhere so prominent that he was reminded of the masks used in the old comedies, which always represented characters alike in name and general similarity, but otherwise varied according to the nature of the play represented.

Ottonieri left no writings on philosophical or other subjects suitable for publication. When some of his friends asked him why he did not express his thoughts in writing as well as in speech, he responded, 'Reading is a conversation carried on with the writer. Now, as in public festivals and entertainments, those who are not, or think they are not part of the spectacle, soon become weary of it, so in conversation it is generally pleasanter to speak than to listen. But books necessarily resemble those persons who, in society, always talk themselves and never listen to others. Thus it is needful that books should say very good and very fine things, and say them in a beautiful manner in order that the reader may pardon them for monopolising the conversation. If a book does not do this it soon becomes as hateful to the reader as an insatiable talker is to the listener.'

II

Ottonieri admitted no distinction between business and pleasure, and whenever he had been occupied in any affair, of however serious a kind, he always said that he had been diverting himself. Only when it happened that he was for a time without occupation did he confess that he was in that interval unamused.

He said that the truest pleasures of life are those which spring from false imaginations, and that whereas children find all even in nothing, men find nothing in anything.

He compared the pleasures which are commonly called real to an artichoke, all the leaves of which must be masticated before the pith can be reached; and he added that such artichokes are very rare, and that many others are found which resemble them in

appearance, but which are destitute of pith. For himself, he said, as he did not care to devour the leaves, he preferred to abstain from leaves and pith alike.

Responding to one who asked him what was the worst moment of life, he said, 'Except the moments of suffering and of fear, the worst, in my opinion, are those of pleasure because the expectation of these moments of pleasure, and the remembrance of them, which are present with us at other times, are better and sweeter things than the pleasures themselves.' He compared human pleasures generally to odours, because he thought that these leave behind them a more grateful remembrance of themselves from the point of view of pleasure than any other sensations; and of all the senses of men he thought that the sense of smell was the most difficult to satiate. He also compared odours to the hope of good; he said that odoriferous things which are good to eat or to taste have usually a better odour than flavour, since there is less pleasure in tasting than in smelling them; or else they prove to be not so good as their odour promised. And he confessed that sometimes he found it very difficult to await patiently the coming of some piece of good fortune, though he was sure of obtaining it; and this, not because he ardently desired it, but from fear that when he obtained it the reality would fall far short of the imaginations and expectations which he had entertained with regard to it. And therefore he used to make every effort to prevent his mind from dwelling upon the expected good, just as he would endeavour to prevent it from dwelling upon the thought of coming troubles.

He remarked also that each of us, from the time of his coming into the world, is like one who lies down on a hard and uncomfortable bed, where, finding himself uneasy, he turns from side to side, and continually changes his position; and thus spends the whole night, always hoping to get a little sleep, and sometimes thinking he is about to obtain it, until the morning having come, he rises as tired as when he lay down.

Watching, in company with some friends, some bees

at work, he said, 'Happy creatures! if you know not how unhappy you are.'

He thought it impossible to enumerate all the miseries of mankind, or to deplore one of them adequately.

To that question of Horace, how it happens that no one is ever content with his own condition in life? he replied, 'The reason is that no condition is happy. Subject and prince, poor and rich, the weak and the strong, all would alike be contented with their lot if they were happy, and would not envy others. Men are not more insatiable than other animals; but only happiness can satisfy them. As they are always unhappy, what wonder is it that they are never content?'

He remarked that supposing a man found himself in the happiest condition possible on earth, but without the prospect of improving it in any way, he would probably be the most miserable of all men. For even the oldest of men hope to better their condition in some manner. And he cited a passage of Xenophon, in which one who desires to buy an estate is counselled to buy an ill-cultivated one; because a well-cultivated estate, from which you can expect no greater yield than it now produces, will not give you so much pleasure as one which you can see growing from good to better; and this holds true of all possessions which may be expected to increase in value.

On the other hand, he remarked that no condition is so miserable that it cannot become worse; and that no man, however unhappy he may be, can console himself by boasting that he is so wretched that he cannot be made more so. Although there is no limit to the hopes of men, the pleasures attainable by mankind are strictly limited; and, weighing the conditions of their lives with their habits and desires, the rich and the poor, the master and the slave, will be found to have, generally speaking, an equal degree of happiness. But nature has put no limit to the evils which afflict mankind; and imagination itself can scarcely feign any calamity so great that it has not been realised in the past or present history of the human

race, or may not be realised in the future. So that, while the greater part of mankind cannot reasonably hope for any improvement in their lot, no one can look upon himself as having no cause for fear; and if fortune is unable to benefit us, it never loses the power to afflict us with new injuries such as not even the firmness of despair itself can resist.

He often laughed at those philosophers who think that man can free himself from the tyranny of fortune by contemning and regarding as things alien all good and evil which are beyond his power to attain or his ability to avoid; and who hold that nothing ought to affect him, either pleasurably or otherwise, save such things as depend entirely upon himself. As to which opinion he said, 'Putting aside the question whether any man ever lived who acted the part of a perfect philosopher in his relations to others, it is certain that no one ever lived or lives as such with himself. It is just as possible not to care for our own concerns more than for those of others as it is to care for those of others as if they were our own. But even granting that the temper of mind of which these philosophers speak were not only possible, which it is not, but actually existed in one of us, and in a measure even more perfect than they represent, and confirmed and naturalised, as it were, by long usage, and tested in numerous cases, would not, even then, the happiness or unhappiness of this person be in the power of fortune? Would not that very temper of mind itself, which these philosophers tell us will enable us to defy fortune, nevertheless be at the mercy of fortune? Is not the reason of man liable every day to countless accidents? Is he not subject to innumerable diseases that cause stupidity, delirium, frenzy, fury, folly, and a hundred other species of insanity, short or lasting, temporary or perpetual; and do they not perturb, debilitate, overthrow, and sometimes extinguish man's reason? Does not memory—the conservator of wisdom—always decay and decline as life advances? How many of us in age fall into a second childhood! And nearly all lose in old age their vigour of mind; or, even

if every faculty of the intellect and memory remain sound and entire, bodily infirmity causes us to lose more or less our courage and constancy of spirit, and sometimes altogether destroys those qualities. In short, it is a great folly to admit that the body is subject to a thousand influences over which we have no control, while denying that the mind, the condition of which depends almost entirely upon the bodily health, is subject to any such external influences.' And he affirmed, in conclusion, that man is wholly, and always, and incontestably, subject to the power of fortune.

Being once asked for what purpose men are born, he answered jestingly, 'To understand how much better it would have been if they had not been born.'

III

With regard to a certain misfortune which had befallen him, he said, 'To lose one whom we love by some unexpected accident, or by sudden and rapid disease, is not so bitter as to see her destroyed little by little (and this had been his case) by prolonged suffering, which does not kill her until she is so changed in body and mind that she is, as it were, a different person from what she had been when in health. A most lamentable thing; because in such a case the loved one does not vanish away leaving you, in place of herself, with a beautiful image of her loveliness in your mind; but appears to your vision altogether different from her whom you loved of old, so that all the illusions of love are torn violently from the soul; and when you have finally lost her, you remember her, not as she was at first, but only as she was at last, when changed by mental and physical suffering. Thus the person beloved is altogether lost, not even surviving in imagination; and memory, which else might in some degree console you, only offers you material for sorrow. And in fine there is nothing in bereavements like these from which we can draw any kind of comfort or consolation.'

Hearing one bewailing himself for I know not what

affliction, and saying, 'Could I deliver myself from this evil, all others would be easy to bear,' he replied, 'Rather those that you now consider light would then become heavy.'

Another saying, 'Had this suffering lasted longer, it would have become insupportable,' he replied, 'Rather becoming used to it, you would have borne it more easily.'

In many things relative to the nature of mankind, he differed from the opinions of the multitude, and sometimes also from those held by the wise and learned. Thus, for example, he denied that it is an opportune time to request or solicit a favour, when the person to whom the request is made is in a state of high good-humour. When the favour, he said, is not such as may be granted at once with little or nothing more than a simple acquiescence, a state of much grief or of much gladness, in the person solicited, is a time very inopportune for a successful appeal to him. For joy and grief alike have the effect of so filling a man's mind with the thought of his own happiness or misery that there is no room in it for other people's affairs. We are so much absorbed in our own good or evil fortune, that we cannot spare a thought for anything else. In either mood men are insusceptible to compassion; in grief a man's pity is wholly reserved for himself; in joy all things present themselves to him in such a cheerful and pleasant light, that misfortunes and afflictions seem to be merely vain imaginations; or at least the mind refuses to dwell upon them, because of their incongruity with its present state. The best times for moving a person to act, or resolve to act, for the good of another, are when he is in a state of calm and moderate cheerfulness, neither excessive nor too lively; or, better still, when he is in a state of general and pervading happiness, not arising from any particular cause, but born of a succession of pleasant thoughts by which the animal spirits have been agreeably, but not violently, agitated. In such states men are most disposed to compassion, and most willing to grant favours; and will then sometimes voluntarily take an

opportunity of doing good to others, or will turn that pleasant mood of their spirit to the accomplishment of some praiseworthy action.

He also denied that the unhappy, when recounting or otherwise revealing their sufferings, receive more pity from those who are afflicted in a similar manner than from other people. On the contrary, they will rather, on hearing your complaints, or learning your condition, attend to one thing only, namely, the comparison of your sufferings with their own, which they are convinced are far more serious. It often happens that when you think you have moved them to compassion, they will interrupt you with a long narrative of their own woes, and endeavour to persuade you that their sufferings are far greater than yours. And he said that such cases remind us of Priam's interview with Achilles as related in the *Iliad*; when the old king knelt suppliant and weeping at the feet of the Grecian hero, the latter began to weep also; not indeed out of compassion for Priam's woes, but because remembrance of his own misfortunes, and of the loss of his father and of his dear friend Patroclus, were thereby awakened. He added that it does sometimes move us to compassion when we see another enduring evils which we have ourselves formerly experienced; but not when both are suffering at the same time from them.

He said that from negligence and thoughtlessness we commit countless cruel and wicked actions, which often have the appearance of being deliberately intended; as, for instance, when a person, taking part in some sport or pastime away from his home, leaves his servants in an open place to be drenched by the rain, not intending to do them harm, but merely from want of thought and want of proper consideration for them. He was of opinion that thoughtlessness is much commoner in men than wickedness, cruelty, and other bad qualities, and that it is the cause of a far greater number of evil deeds. Many of the actions of men which are attributed to intentional wickedness are really due to mere thoughtlessness.

He said on a certain occasion that complete and manifest ingratitude is less grievous to a benefactor than to see himself repaid for a great benefit with a small one, by which the object of his bounty, either through bluntness of perception or malevolence, thinks himself, or pretends to think himself, released from any further obligation towards him. For in such a case the benefactor must out of politeness make a show of accepting the small benefit in full exchange for his own greater one ; so that, on the one hand, he is defrauded of the bare and sterile gratitude which he has a right to expect ; and, on the other, he cannot complain of the ingratitude which he has received, or allow it to appear, as the fact is, that his kindness has been badly requited.

I have also heard the following saying attributed to him : ' We are inclined and accustomed to presuppose in those with whom we converse much skill and acuteness in discerning our good qualities, or those which we believe ourselves to possess, and we imagine that they fully recognise the beauty or other virtues by which our words and actions are distinguished. We believe them to be profoundly impressed by our merits, so that they often reflect upon them and always bear them in mind. And yet, curiously enough, we never discover any such good qualities in them, or at all events we do not admit, even to ourselves, that we have discovered them.'

IV

He remarked that irresolute men are sometimes very persistent in their undertakings, in spite of many difficulties, and this in consequence of their very irresolution, because if they gave up their design they would have to make a second resolution. Sometimes they are very prompt and energetic in putting into execution what they have resolved upon ; because they fear that if they relaxed their efforts their want of resolution might cause them to abandon their enterprise, and thus involve them again in that grievous

perplexity and suspense of mind which tormented them before they came to a decision. Therefore they hasten the execution of their design and apply to it all their energies; stimulated thereto rather by anxiety and doubt as to their power of persistence than by a desire to accomplish the end in view, or to overcome the obstacles which they must surmount in order to reach it.

He once said smilingly that persons who are accustomed to communicate their own thoughts and feelings freely to others will cry out, even when alone, if a fly troubles them, or if a vase is overturned or slips from their hand; whereas those who are accustomed to a life of solitude and self-restraint will not utter a word in the company of others even though they should be attacked by a fit of apoplexy.

He thought that many of the men, ancient and modern, who have gained great reputations, have done so chiefly by virtue of the preponderance of some of their qualities over the others. A man in whom the various qualities of the spirit were well balanced and proportioned among themselves, even though they were extraordinary and great beyond measure, would find it difficult to do great deeds, or to acquire either with his contemporaries or with posterity a reputation for greatness.

He distinguished in modern civilised nations three classes of persons. The first class consists of those in whom their own particular disposition, as well as the elemental nature which is common to all men, has been changed and transformed by the influence of art and the habits of civilised life. This class comprises all those who are fit for public and private affairs, and who are able to take part pleasantly in the polite commerce of the world, and to make themselves agreeable to their associates, and who are, in short, in every way adapted to fulfil the requirements of modern social life. It is men of this class only, speaking generally, he said, who attain and possess the esteem of their countrymen in civilised states. The second class consists of those whose natural dispositions have not been sufficiently modified, either from want of what is called

cultivation, or because, in consequence of its original narrowness and insufficiency, it was little apt to receive and to profit by the impressions and the effects of art, experience, and example. This is the most numerous of the three classes ; it is despised not only by others, but by itself, and is indeed worthy of little or no consideration. It consists, in short, of all those who deserve to be called 'the vulgar,' in whatever condition or state fortune may have placed them. The third class, incomparably inferior in number to the two others, is almost as much despised as the second, and sometimes indeed even more. It consists of those men in whom the primal instincts of nature are so strongly implanted that they resist or repulse the influence of our present mode of life, and refuse to conform to its requirements, or are at all events so little affected by it that they are unfit for the practical business of the world, and do not know how to make themselves pleasant or agreeable in society. And he subdivided this class into two species, the one altogether strong and vigorous, disdaining the disdain with which they are generally regarded, and often rejoicing in this disdain as if they were honoured by it, differing from others not only by necessity of nature, but also by their own will and choice, caring nothing for the hopes and pleasures of ordinary men, solitary in the midst of cities, and avoiding others as much as they are themselves avoided. He added that men of this kind are very rarely met with. As to the other species, he said that in it strength is mingled with weakness and timidity to such a degree that those who belong to it are always in conflict with themselves. Men of this kind do not willingly consent to be excluded from society ; on the contrary, they desire to emulate in many ways the conduct of the men of the first class ; and it is a constant affliction to them to find themselves disesteemed by others, and ranked below those whom they know to be immeasurably inferior in genius and character. Such men never succeed in life : whatever care and diligence they may use, they are never able to adapt themselves to the

usages of the world, or to make themselves at home in society, so as to be at ease with themselves and with others. Many men of the finest and most delicate genius in recent times and in our own days have belonged to this species. And he mentioned as a signal example Jean Jacques Rousseau, adding, as an example from antiquity, Virgil, of whom in the *Life* which is attributed to the grammarian Donatus (cap. 6), it is reported on the authority of Melissus, also a grammarian and the freedman of Mecenae, that he was very slow of speech, and appeared to be a quite ordinary person. And it seemed to him that this was the fact; and that Virgil, owing to the very fineness of his genius, was little fitted to shine in society, was proved, he thought, not only by the exceedingly subtle and laborious artifice of his style and the peculiar nature of his poetry, but also by a passage which may be found near the end of the second book of the *Georgics*. In this the poet, contrary to the practice of the ancient Romans, and especially those of great genius, evinces a desire for a life of solitude and obscurity; and, from the manner in which he there expresses himself, we may judge that he did not so much desire it for its own sake, but rather as a remedy and a refuge, because, owing to his peculiar temperament, it did not suit him to take part in the business of the world. And as, speaking generally, the men of these two species are not esteemed, save some of them after death, while those of the second class are of no account either living or dead, he was of opinion that it might be affirmed as a rule without exception that no man could gain the general esteem of his fellows if his natural disposition had not undergone a great change or transmutation. Moreover, seeing that in these days the first class, which is the mean between the two others, is able to impose its will upon all the rest of the world, he concluded from this and from a thousand other circumstances that the power and management of human affairs is almost entirely in the hands of mediocrity.

He distinguished also three states of old age con-

sidered in relation to the other ages of man. In the infancy of the world, when all ages were just and virtuous by habit and custom, and when experience and knowledge of men and of life had not yet had the effect of alienating the minds of men from honesty and uprightness, old age was venerable above the other ages ; because added to the spirit of justice and to the other virtues then prevailing, old men possessed, as it was natural they should, a greater degree of sense and prudence than the younger men. But when in process of time manners became corrupted and perverted, old age, on the contrary, became the vilest and most abominable of all ; since old men are more inclined to evil than others, because of their long experience in the practice of it, their great knowledge of human affairs, the influence exercised upon them by the wickedness which they see existing all about them, and that coldness of heart which is natural to them. At the same time they are impotent to execute their evil designs, save by means of calumny, fraud, perfidy, cunning, dissimulation, and in brief all the basest and most abject arts. But when at last the corruptions of men had passed all bounds, and the contempt of rectitude and virtue preceded in them experience and knowledge of the world, and of the sad truth about it ; when, in short, the youngest in age proved themselves the expertest and most instructed in vice, old age became, I will not say more venerable, for thenceforward very few things deserved such a title, but more endurable than the other ages. For the fervour of mind and the strength of body which had formerly been instrumental in stimulating the imagination and in prompting it to noble thoughts, and had therefore been the cause, in some degree, of virtuous habits, sentiments, and deeds, had now become incentives to evil and agents of vicious actions, and thus gave force and vivacity to that wickedness, which in the aged is lessened and modified by coldness of heart and decay of bodily strength, though these are things which are usually more conducive to vice than to virtue. At last the knowledge and experience of the worthlessness

and baseness of all things human, instead of corrupting the good, as in the past, had the effect of disgusting even the bad, and sometimes led them, partially, if not wholly, to reform their conduct. Thus, if we compare old age with the other ages in regard to conduct, it may be said that it was in the earliest times as better to good ; in the times of corruption as worst to bad ; and in the following period of utter depravity as bad to worst.

V

He frequently discoursed about that kind of self-love which we now term egotism, inasmuch as occasions to remark upon it only too often offered themselves to him. I will now relate some of his sayings upon this subject :—

He said that nowadays when anyone is praised for his honesty, or blamed for his knavery, by one who has had, or is likely to have, dealings with him, all that you can infer from that is that the person who praises or blames is well or ill satisfied with him ; well, if he speaks well of him, ill, if he reviles him.

He denied that anyone in these times can love unless he has a rival ; and being asked why, responded, ‘ Because it is evident that the person beloved is a very ardent rival of the lover.’

Suppose, said he, that you request a favour of a friend, of such a kind that he could not grant it without incurring the hatred or ill-will of another friend ; all three being much alike as regards fortune and station in life. I say that probably your request would be refused even though the gratification of your desire would put you under great obligations to your benefactor, and would make you much more his friend than it would make the other his enemy. For the fact is that men fear more the effects of the hatred and wrath of others than they hope from their love and gratitude, and reasonably enough, because the former passions are more powerful in their operation, and produce greater results than the latter. The cause of

this is that he who seeks to harm another whom he hates, and upon whom he endeavours to revenge himself, does it for his own gratification ; whereas he who studies to assist those whom he loves, or to repay a benefit received, works for the profit of others.

He said that in general the attentions and services which are rendered to others, with the hope and expectation of receiving favours in return, seldom achieve their end ; since men, especially now that they have more sense and knowledge than they used to have, are far more willing to receive than to give. Nevertheless, in the case of attentions and services rendered by young persons to rich and influential old people, they not only very often attain their end, but more often than not.

The following remarks, which chiefly concern our modern manners, I have myself heard him give utterance to :—

There is nothing of which experienced men of the world are now ashamed, except of being ashamed : nor do they ever blush for any other cause, if, indeed, they have not lost the power of blushing.

Marvellous is the power of fashion : for while nations and men are so tenacious of their usages in everything else, and so stubborn in judging, acting, and conducting themselves in conformity to custom, even against reason and their own interests, fashion, on the contrary, whenever it will, makes them instantly abandon, change, or assume manners, customs, and opinions ; although the things abandoned may be reasonable, useful, and beautiful, while those which displace them are quite the contrary.

There are countless things in common life and in individuals which are truly ridiculous, and yet are very seldom laughed at, or if anyone attempts to laugh at them he soon desists, because he finds that others do not join in his laughter. On the contrary, we laugh continually at many things of a serious and commendable character, and in such cases others are always ready to join in our laughter. In fact most of the things at which we are accustomed to laugh are not in

reality ridiculous, and we often laugh indeed for the very reason that the subject of our laughter is an unworthy or insufficient one.

We are continually hearing or using such phrases as 'the good ancients,' 'our good ancestors,' or 'a man cast in the antique mould,' meaning an honest man in whom we can trust. Each generation believes on the one hand that the ancients were better than the moderns; and on the other that the human race is continually progressing and improving, and that if it returned to its primitive condition it would be a great misfortune.

It is certain that truth is not a synonym for beauty. Nevertheless, pleasure may sometimes be derived from truth; and if, in human affairs, beauty is to be preferred to truth, the latter, where the former is wanting, is to be preferred to everything else. But in great cities beauty is altogether absent, since it has no longer a place in the life or thoughts of men. The true also is not to be found in them, because everything there is counterfeit and unreal. So that, so to speak, you see, hear, touch, and breathe in them nothing but falsity, and this of the ugliest and most odious kind. It may be said that this, to fine and delicate spirits, is the crowning misery of life.

Those who are not themselves compelled to provide for their own necessities, and who therefore depend upon others for the means of subsistence, are usually unable (or at least only able with much difficulty, and always insufficiently) to provide for one of the chief wants of life—I mean the want of some method of employing their time. This is indeed the greatest of all wants; greater than any of the wants which men by their occupations find means of satisfying, and greater even than the very necessity of living. For life itself is not a necessity, since, if disjoined from happiness, it is not worth having. But if we are to live, our first and greatest object must be so to conduct ourselves that we may endure as little unhappiness as possible. An unemployed or vacant life is most unhappy; whereas the kind of employment by which life

is made most bearable is that by means of which our necessities are provided for.

He said that the custom of buying and selling human beings was useful to our race ; and in confirmation of his opinion, he said that the practice of inoculating for the small-pox, which had passed from Constantinople to England, and thence to the other countries of Europe, originated in Circassia, where small-pox, in addition to the destruction which it wrought amongst their infants and youths, was found to prejudice seriously the traffic which they carried on in their daughters.

He narrated of himself that when he left school and entered the world, being young and inexperienced and loving truth, he resolved never to praise any person or thing he might encounter in society, if not such as to appear to him truly praiseworthy. But a year having passed away, during which, in consequence of his resolve, he had not praised any person or thing, he began to fear that he would altogether forget, for want of exercise, all that he had learnt in his study of rhetoric with regard to the encomiastic or panegyrical style, and therefore broke his resolution, and soon afterwards entirely renounced it.

VI

It was Ottonieri's custom to have books read to him, generally those of the ancient classics. During the reading he would interpose remarks of his own, making a running commentary, as it were, on various passages as they were read out. Thus, listening one day to the reading of Diogenes Laertius's *Lives of the Philosophers*, where it is stated that Chilo, being asked in what respect the learned differ from the unlearned, replied, 'The learned have hope,' Ottonieri said, 'Now, it is quite the contrary, for the ignorant hope, while the learned hope for nothing.'

Similarly, when a passage from the same *Lives* was read to him which states that Socrates affirmed that

there was but one good in the world, namely, knowledge, and but one evil, namely, ignorance, he remarked, 'I know nothing as to the knowledge and ignorance of the ancients; but as regards the moderns I would reverse this saying.'

In the same book, relative to this doctrine of the followers of Hegesias: 'The wise man, in all his actions, will always consider his own interests,' he remarked, 'If all those who act in this manner to-day are philosophers, Plato may come at once and establish his Republic in all civilised countries.'

He much commended a sentence of Bion, the Borysthenite, recorded by the same Laertius, to the effect that those who seek most ardently for happiness are the most unhappy. And he added that the most blest are those who are contented with little, and who are able to derive pleasure from past joys by ruminating over them.

He applied to the different ages of civilisation that Greek verse which signifies, 'The young act, the middle-aged deliberate, the old regret,' and he added that nothing is left to the present age save regret.

A passage in Plutarch tells how the Athenians, being persuaded by Statocles to make a sacrifice as if they were victors, whereas they had really been defeated, were much enraged against him when they discovered the truth. But Statocles answered their reproaches by saying, 'What injury have I done you in making you happy for three or four days?' Ottonieri added that the same answer might well be made to those who complain of Nature that she keeps the truth concealed from mankind, hidden under many vain, though beautiful and delightful, appearances. 'What injury,' she might say, 'do I inflict upon you in making you happy for a little time?' And on another occasion he remarked that what Tasso said of a child induced to take medicine by false pretences, 'His life is saved by deception,' is equally applicable to humanity in general, with regard to the errors and delusions by which it is ruled.

A passage in the *Paradoxes* of Cicero being read to

him, which may be rendered thus, 'Do then voluptuous delights make a man better or more praiseworthy? And is there indeed anyone who boasts of having enjoyed them?' he said, 'Dear Cicero, I dare not affirm that the moderns become by such delights better or more praiseworthy, but more praised, certainly. Indeed you must know that to-day almost all the young select and follow this sole pathway to praise; I mean the path of pleasure. Not only do they boast of the pleasures which they have enjoyed, and tell all sorts of stories about them to willing or unwilling hearers; but very many desire and seek such pleasures, not for their own sakes, but as means to obtain praise or notoriety, and as matter for self-glorification. Often indeed similar claims are made when no such pleasures have been enjoyed, or even sought for; and are in fact wholly fictitious.'

He remarked that in Arrian's History of the Enterprises of Alexander the Great it is stated that at the battle of Issus, Darius placed his Greek mercenaries in the front of his army, whereas Alexander placed his mercenaries, also Greek, in the rear; and he thought that from this circumstance alone the result of the battle might have been predicted.

Far from blaming those writers who speak much of themselves, he liked and praised them; for, said he, in writing thus they are almost always, and almost all eloquent, and their style is usually animated and befitting, even when it is not so on other subjects, and though it may differ from the conventional style of their time and nation. And this is not to be wondered at, since those who write of their own affairs have their minds strongly interested in and full of their subject, which furnishes them with an abundance of thoughts and emotions, not borrowed from other authors nor drawn from other sources, and therefore not trite or commonplace. They have no need on such a subject to use ornaments, frivolous in themselves, or inappropriate, nor to embellish their style with false graces, or beauties rather apparent than real; nor are they tempted to be affected or untrue to

nature. And he did not believe it to be true that readers care little for what writers say about themselves; firstly, because all that is really felt and thought by a writer, and said in a natural and unpretentious manner, commands attention, and makes an impression on the reader's mind; secondly, because no author can discuss the affairs of others with the amount of truth and vigour which he brings to the discussion of his own. Moreover, since all men resemble one another, both in their natural qualities, and in those which are due to accident or fortune, it follows that human life, as it is felt and conceived in one's own person, will be much more clearly apprehended than it could be in other persons. In confirmation of these thoughts, Ottonieri instanced among other things, the Oration of Demosthenes for the Crown, in which, wherever the orator speaks of himself, he surpasses himself in eloquence. It is the same with Cicero, whenever he touches on his own affairs, and more particularly in his defence of Milo, a marvellous performance in all respects, but most marvellous towards the end, where the orator introduces himself. And the finest and most eloquent passage in all the orations of Bossuet, is that in which, after pronouncing his eulogium upon the Prince de Condé, he alludes to his own old age and approaching death. Among the writings of the Emperor Julian, for the most part sophistical and often unendurable, the most judicious and praiseworthy is the discourse against the wearing of the beard, entitled *Misopogon*, in which he defends himself against the taunts and slanders of the people of Antioch. In this little work, not to mention other merits, he is little inferior to Lucian, either in comic grace, or in the abundance, acuteness, and liveliness of his witty sallies; whereas in his work on the Cæsars, in which he plainly imitates Lucian, he is without grace, and his wit is poor, feeble, and pointless. Among the Italians, who can boast of so few eloquent writers, the apology which Lorenzo de Medici wrote in justification of his conduct is an example of grand and perfect eloquence. Tasso also, in his prose writings,

is often eloquent when he speaks of himself ; and he is almost always particularly so in his letters, where it may be said that he is occupied solely with his own concerns.

VII

Many other good sayings and witty repartees of Ottonieri's are recorded ; for instance, his reply to a youth well read in books, but inexperienced in the world, who said that he daily learned a hundred leaves in the arts of social life and knowledge of the world ; whereupon he said, ' Yes, but the book has five million leaves.'

To another youth, rash and inconsiderate, who, in order to defend himself against those who reproached him with his continual follies, and pointed out to him the disgrace which he thus incurred, used to respond by saying that life was of no more account than a comedy, Ottonieri said, ' Even in a comedy it is better to gain applause than hisses ; and besides, the comedian ill-instructed in his art, or clumsy in the practice of it, dies at last of starvation.'

The officers of the law having arrested an assassin, who, being lame, was not able to escape after committing the crime, Ottonieri remarked, ' You see, friends, that Justice, although indeed she is said to be lame, is nevertheless able to overtake the malefactor, provided he is lame also.'

Travelling in Italy, a courtier who wished to amuse himself at his expense said to him, ' I will speak honestly to you, if you will give me permission' ; whereupon he said, ' Indeed I shall be delighted to hear you ; in travelling one seeks for rarities.'

Being once constrained, I know not by what necessity, to ask for a loan of money from someone, who, in excusing himself for not lending it, said that, were he a rich man, his chief anxiety would be to supply the wants of his friends, he answered, ' I will pray God that you may never be rich ; for I should be very sorry that you should ever be anxious on our account.'

In some verses written in his youth he had made use of certain antique words. An old lady to whom he read the verses said she could not understand those words, which were not current in her time. He replied, 'Surely they must have been current then, for they are very old.'

Of a very rich miser, from whom a very small sum of money had been stolen, he said that he had acted in a miserly way even to the thieves.

Of a man who set himself to count the words or the things which he happened to hear or see, he said, 'Other people do things, this fellow counts them.'

To some antiquaries who disputed together about an antique statuette of Jupiter in terra-cotta, and who asked his opinion, he said, 'Do you not see that this is a Jupiter of Crete*?'

Of a foolish fellow who believed himself to be an excellent reasoner, and who at every two or three words mentioned logic, he said, 'This is evidently the very man whom the Greeks defined as a logical animal.'

When his end was near, he composed the following inscription, which was engraved upon his tomb :—

BONES OF
FILIPPO OTTONIERI
BORN FOR VIRTUOUS ACTIONS
AND FOR GLORY
LIVED IDLE AND USELESS
AND DIED WITHOUT FAME
BUT NOT IGNORANT OF NATURE
OR OF HIMSELF.

* A pun : 'crete' in Italian meaning clay.

DIALOGUE OF
• CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS AND
PETER GUTIERREZ

C. A beautiful night, my friend.

P. G. Beautiful indeed : and I think that seen from land it would be still more beautiful.

C. Quite right : so you also are tired of voyaging.

P. G. Not at all of voyaging ; but this voyage proves longer than I expected, and I find it a little tedious. Nevertheless you must not think I complain of you, like the others. Rather hold it for certain that whatever resolution you may come to with respect to the voyage, I will always second you, as heretofore, to the utmost of my power. But, by way of conversation, I should be glad if you would tell me precisely, in all sincerity, whether you still feel as sure as in the beginning of discovering land in this part of the world ; or whether after so much time and so much experience to the contrary, you do not begin to doubt.

C. Speaking plainly, and as one can with a confidential friend, I confess that I have begun to doubt a little ; so much the more that during the voyage many signs which have given me great hope have proved vain ; as was that of the birds coming from the west, which flew over us a few days after we left Gomera, and which I thought an indication of land not far off. Similarly, I have seen from day to day that results have not corresponded to more than one conjecture and more than one prognostication which I made before we put to sea, as to various things which would occur to us, as I believed, in the course of the voyage. Therefore I reflect that as these prognostics have deceived me, although they appeared to me almost certain ; so the principal conjecture itself may prove vain, the conjecture that land would be found beyond the ocean. It is indeed true that this

conjecture has such foundations that if it nevertheless proves false, I shall believe on the one hand that we cannot put faith in any human judgment, except it wholly relates to things present to the sight and touch. But on the other hand, I reflect that often and indeed in the majority of instances the reality does not agree with the speculation; and thus say to myself: How can you know that each part of the world is so similar to the others, that, the eastern hemisphere being occupied partly by land and partly by water, it follows that the western must be shared between these two likewise? How can you know that it is not altogether occupied by one immense sea? or that, instead of land, or land and water, it does not contain some other element? Granted that it has lands and seas like the other, may it not be uninhabited? and even uninhabitable? Suppose that it is inhabited no less than ours: what certainty have you that there are rational creatures in it as in ours? and even if there are, how do you make sure that they are men, and not some other kind of intellectual animals? and, being men, that they are not very different from those you know? (to put a case) much bigger, more robust, more active; naturally endowed with much more talent and genius; also much better civilised, and enriched with many more arts and sciences*. These things I own perplex me not a little. And in truth nature is seen to be furnished with so much power, and her productions are so various and manifold, that not only are we unable to judge with certainty what she has done and is doing in parts very distant from and quite unknown to our world, but we may even doubt whether one does not immensely deceive himself in arguing from this to those; and it would not be against probability to imagine that the unknown things of the world, either altogether or in part, are wonderful and alien to us. We behold with

* But in this case they would surely have discovered us long before you set out to discover them, O heroic Columbus.—*Translator's Note.*

our own eyes, that in these waters, the needle of the compass deflects from the north star not a small space toward the west; a thing most novel, and until now unheard of among navigators; and for which, with all my musing, I cannot find a reason that satisfies me. For all this, I do not say that we should lend an ear to the fables of the ancients about the wonders of the unexplored world, and of this Ocean; as for example, to the fable of the countries described by Auno (or Hanno), which at night were full of flames and torrents of fire overflowing into the sea: indeed we know how vain have hitherto proved all the fears of dreadful miracles and novelties which our people have had in this voyage; as when, in beholding that quantity of seaweed, which appeared to make the water almost a meadow, and somewhat hindered our progress, they thought we were on the ultimate limits of the navigable sea. But I would only infer, complying with your demand, that although my conjecture is founded on most probable arguments, not merely in my own judgment, but in the judgment of many excellent geographers, astronomers, and navigators, with whom I have discussed it, as you are aware, in Spain, in Italy, and in Portugal; nevertheless it may prove fallacious; for, I repeat, we find that many conclusions drawn from the best reasonings, do not bear the test of experience; and this occurs more than ever when they appertain to things concerning which we have very little light.

P. G. So that, virtually, you have staked your life and the lives of your companions, upon the foundation of a mere speculative opinion?

C. So it is: I cannot deny it. But leaving apart the fact that men every day put their lives in peril on foundations very much weaker, and for things of the most trivial value, or even without thought of the value; consider a little. If at present you and I, and all our companions, were not in this vessel, in the midst of this sea, in this unknown solitude, in a state as uncertain and perilous as you please; in what other condition of life should we find ourselves? in what

should we be occupied? in what mode should we pass these days? Perhaps more cheerfully? or should we not rather be in some greater trouble or solicitude, or else full of tedium? What is understood by a state free from uncertainty and peril? if content and happy, it is to be preferred to any other whatever; if tedious and miserable, I do not see what other is not to be preferred to it. I care not to mention the glory and utility we shall carry back, if the enterprise succeeds according to our hope. Should no other fruit come from this navigation, to me it appears most profitable inasmuch as for a time it preserves us free from tedium, makes life dear to us, makes valuable to us many things that otherwise we should not have in consideration. The ancients write, as you have read or heard, that unhappy lovers throwing themselves from the rock of Santa Maura (then termed Leucadia) into the sea, and escaping, were thenceforth, by the grace of Apollo, free from the amorous passion. I know not whether we should believe that this result was obtained; but I know well that, issued from such danger, for a little time, even without the favour of Apollo, they would have held life dear which before they held in hate; or at least would have held it more dear and precious than before. Every navigation is, in my judgment, as it were a leap from the Leucadian rock; producing the same benefits, but more lasting than that produced; to which, on this account, it is much superior. It is commonly believed that sailors and soldiers, being so often in danger of death, value their own life less than others value theirs. I for the very same reason think that very few people love and value life so much as sailors and soldiers. How many boons which having we do not care for, nay, how many things which are not even called boons, seem most dear and precious to the navigator, only because he is deprived of them! Who ever numbers among human blessings the having a little land to sustain one's feet? Nobody except navigators, and above all ourselves, who through the great uncertainty of the success of this voyage, have

no greater desire than for the sight of a little corner of land: this is the first thought that presents itself when we awake, and with it we fall asleep; and if only some time we discern afar the summit of a mountain or forest, or other landmark, we shall not contain ourselves for joy: and, having landed, with the sole thought of finding ourselves again upon the solid ground and being able to go walking here and there at our pleasure, we shall for several days esteem ourselves blessed.

P. G. All this is most true: so much so, that if your speculative conjecture proves as sound as is your justification for having followed it, we cannot fail to enjoy such beatitude some day or other.

C. For me, although I no longer dare to promise myself this with certainty, I nevertheless would hope that we are about to enjoy it soon. For some days past, as you are aware, the plummet grounds; and the nature of the matter it brings up appears to me a good sign. Towards evening I have noticed that the clouds about the sun are different in form and colour from those of the preceding days. The air, as you can feel, has become more sweet and tepid than heretofore. The wind no longer blows so full, and straight, and steady; but rather uncertain and variable, and as if interrupted by some obstacle. Add that cane which went drifting on the sea, and appeared to have been cut but a short time; and that tree-branch with its berries rosy and fresh. And then the flocks of birds, although they have deceived me before, yet now there are so many that pass, and so large, and they increase so from day to day, that I think we may in some measure rely upon them; especially as we see among them some that, by their shape, do not appear to me seabirds. In short all these signs gathered together, although I would be very diffident, nevertheless keep me in great and good hope.

P. G. God grant this time that it be fulfilled.

IN PRAISE OF BIRDS

ÆMILIUS, a solitary philosopher, sitting with his books one spring morning in the shade of his country house, and reading, was struck by the singing of the birds in the open air, and gradually gave himself to listen and muse, and left off reading; at last he took pen in hand, and in that same place wrote the things which follow.

Birds are naturally the most joyous creatures in the world. I do not say this because when you see or hear them they always give you pleasure; but I mean it of them in their own selves, and would say that they feel joy and gladness more than any other animal. The other animals commonly look serious and grave; and many of them even appear melancholy: they seldom give signs of joy, and these are slight and brief; in the greater part of their enjoyments and satisfactions they do not display delight or any symptoms of mirthfulness; and even if they have pleasure in green plains, open and lovely prospects, splendid suns, crystalline and sweet airs, they are not wont to show it outwardly: except that it is said of the hares at night when the moon shines, and particularly when it is full moon, that they leap and play together, rejoicing in the brightness, as Xenophon has written. Birds for the most part show themselves extremely joyous by their movements and their aspect; and the virtue they have of cheering us by their presence proceeds from nothing but this, that their forms and acts universally are such as naturally denote special capability and disposition for enjoyment and rejoicing; an appearance not to be reputed vain and deceptive. With every delight and satisfaction they have, they sing; and the greater the delight or satisfaction, the more power and earnestness do they put into the singing. And as they sing a good part of their time, we may infer that ordinarily they are cheerful and enjoy life. And although it is noted that

while they are in love they sing better, and more often, and longer than at other times ; it must not therefore be believed that they are not moved to sing by other delights and other satisfactions than those of love. For in fact it is observed that on a day serene and tranquil they sing more than on one obscure and troubled : and in the tempest they keep silent, as they do also in every other fear that assails them ; and when this is past they return into the open air singing and sporting with one another. Similarly it is remarked that they are wont to sing in the early morning at their awaking ; being moved partly by the joy they have in the new day, partly by that pleasure common to all animals in feeling themselves restored and refreshed by sleep. They likewise rejoice particularly in cheerful verdure, fruitful vales, pure and lucid waters, fair landscapes. In which things it is remarkable that what appears agreeable and lovely to ourselves, appears the same to them ; as may be known by the lures with which they are drawn to the nets or snares in the places for catching them. It may be known also from the nature of those parts of the country which usually are most frequented by birds, and where their song is assiduous and fervid. But of the other animals, except perhaps those which are domesticated and accustomed to live with men, none or few make the same judgment as ourselves as to the pleasantness and desirability of places. Nor is this to be wondered at : for they have pleasure only in what is natural. Now in these things, a very great part of what we call natural, is not so, but is indeed artificial : thus cultivated fields, trees and other plants reared and disposed in order, streams confined between fixed boundaries and directed in a certain course, and such things, have neither the condition nor the appearance they would have naturally. So that the aspect of every country inhabited for some generations by civilised men, even not considering the towns and the other places where men bring themselves to live together, is artificial, and very different from what it would be in nature. Some say, and it would bear on this subject,

that the voice of birds is more soft and sweet, and their song more modulated, in our parts, than in those where men are savage and rude; and they conclude that birds, even when free, acquire some little of the civilisation of the men to whose abodes they are accustomed.

Whether these speak correctly or not, it certainly was a remarkable provision of Nature to assign to the same species of animal both song and flight; so that those which had to cheer other living things with the voice should be usually aloft; whence it could spread around through a greater space, and reach a greater number of hearers: and so that the air, which is the element destined for sound, should be populous with vocal and musical creatures. Certainly much comfort and delight, and in my opinion not less to the other animals than to men, is afforded by hearing the song of birds. And I believe that the pleasure arises principally, not from the suavity of the sounds, although this is great, nor from their variety, nor from their mutual adaptation; but from that announcement of cheerfulness which is naturally made by song in general, and by the song of birds in particular. Which song is, so to say, a laughter uttered by the bird when it feels itself well and happy.

Whence it might be said with some truth that birds participate the privilege which man has of laughter; and which the other animals have not; and this has caused some to think that as man is defined an intellectual or rational animal, he might be not less sufficiently defined a laughing animal; it appearing to them that laughter is no less essential and particular to man than is reason. And certainly it is a wonderful thing that in man, who of all creatures is the most afflicted and wretched, should be found the faculty of laughter, which is alien from every other animal. Wonderful also is the use we make of this faculty: for we see many in some very severe accident, others in great sadness of mind, others that scarcely retain any love at all for life, perfectly assured of the vanity of every human good, almost incapable of any joy, void of every hope: who never-

theless laugh. Indeed, the better they know the vanity of promised good, and the infelicity of life, and the less they hope, and the less even they are fit for enjoyment, so much the more are individual men wont to be inclined to laughter. The nature of which generally, and the interior sources and modes, as regards that part of it consisting in the mind, can scarcely be defined and explained: except perhaps by declaring that laughter is a species of folly not durable, or even of raving and delirium. For men, not being ever satisfied nor ever truly delighted by anything, cannot have a reasonable and just cause of laughter. It would even be curious to investigate how and on what occasion man was first brought to use and be aware of this power of his. For in fact it is not doubtful that in the primitive and barbarous state he shows himself for the most part serious, as do the other animals; and even in appearance melancholy. Wherefore I am of opinion that laughter not only came into the world after weeping, as to which there cannot be any controversy; but that a good space of time elapsed ere it was first attempted and discovered. During which period neither did the mother smile upon her infant, nor the infant recognise her with a smile, as says Virgil. For if now, at least where people are brought to civilised life, human beings commence to laugh shortly after birth; they do so chiefly in virtue of example, because they see others laughing. And I could believe that the first occasion and the first cause of laughter to men has been intoxication; another effect inherent and special to the human race. This had its origin a long time before men reached any sort of civilisation; for we know that there has scarcely been found a people so rude that they have not made provision by some beverage, or in some other mode, to intoxicate themselves, and who do not greedily use it. Nor are these things to be wondered at; considering that men, as they are unhappy beyond all other animals, are also delighted more than any other by every painless alienation of mind, by forgetfulness of themselves, by the intermission, so to speak, of life; so that when the sense

and consciousness of their inherent evils are interrupted, or for some time diminished in them, they receive not a small benefit. And in respect to laughter, it is observed that barbarians, although of serious and sad aspect at other times, yet when intoxicated laugh profusely ; talking much likewise and singing, contrary to their habitudes. But these things I will discuss more fully in a history of laughter, that I have it in mind to make in which, having investigated its origin, I will follow with a narration of its achievements, and accidents, and fortunes from then until the present time ; wherein it is found to be in greater dignity and power than it ever was ; holding among civilised peoples a place and fulfilling an office, by which it in a certain manner performs the functions exercised in other times by virtue, justice, honour, and the like ; and in many things restraining and frightening men from ill-doing. Now to finish with the song of birds, I say that since joyfulness seen or known in others, when it is not envied, is wont to comfort and gladden ; therefore Nature very laudably provided that the song of birds, which is an expression of gladness, and a species of laughter, should be public ; while the song and laughter of man, with respect to the remainder of the world, are private ; and she acted sagely in sprinkling the earth and the air with animals that, continually uttering sounds of joy resonant and solemn, should as it were applaud universal life, and incite other living things to gladness, bearing perpetual testimony, though false, to the felicity of the world.

And that birds are and show themselves joyous more than other animals is not without good reason. For in truth, as I have hinted at the commencement, they are by nature better fitted to enjoy and to be happy. Firstly, it does not appear that they are subject to tedium. They change place every moment ; they pass from one district to another however remote, and from the lowest to the loftiest region of the air, in a short space of time, and with admirable facility ; they see and experience in the course of their life an infini-

tude of very various things ; they perpetually exercise their body ; they abound exceedingly in extrinsic life. All the other animals, when they have satisfied their wants, love to rest tranquil and lazy ; none, except perhaps the fishes, and except also some of the volatile insects, go darting about long merely for amusement. Thus man in a state of barbarism, except in supplying day by day his necessities, which demand but little and short exertion, or if the tempest, or some wild beast, or other similar cause does not drive him, is scarcely used to stir a step : loves chiefly indolence and negligence ; consumes little less than whole days sitting careless and silent in his rude hut, or in the open air, or in the clefts and caverns of the cliffs and rocks. Birds, on the contrary, linger but a very short time in the same place ; go and come continually without any necessity at all ; practise flight for amusement ; and sometimes having gone for pleasure hundreds of miles from the district they usually frequent, return thither in the evening of the same day. And during the short time they remain in one spot, you never see them remain still ; they are always turning this way and that, always wheeling, bending, stretching, shaking, fluttering, with a liveliness, an agility, a swiftness of movement inexpressible. In short, from when the bird is out of the egg until it dies, save the intervals of sleep, it does not rest quiet a moment. By which considerations it would appear we may affirm that the natural ordinary state of other animals, including men, is rest ; of birds, movement.

To these exterior qualities and conditions correspond the intrinsic, those of the mind ; by which, in the same way, birds are better adapted for felicity than other animals. Having the hearing very acute, and the sight so vigorous and perfect that our mind can hardly form an adequate conception of it ; by which power they enjoy every day immense and most diversified prospects, and from aloft discover in a single instant so great an expanse of the earth, and distinctly perceive so many regions with the eye, as man even with his intellect can scarcely comprehend at once ; it

is to be inferred that they must have very great force and vivacity, and very great usage of imagination. Not of that imagination profound, fervid, and tempestuous, which Dante and Tasso had ; which is a most fatal dower, the source of grievous and perpetual anxieties and sufferings ; but of that rich, variegated, active, changeful, childlike ; which is the most abundant wellspring of pleasant and joyous thoughts, of sweet errors, of manifold delights and satisfactions, and the greatest and most fruitful gift with which Nature is ever bountiful to living souls. So that birds have of this faculty, in great abundance, what is good and conducive to gladness of heart, without, however, sharing in what is noxious and painful. And as they abound in extrinsic life, so are they equally rich in the interior : but in manner that the abundance results in their benefit and delight, as with children, not in harm and extreme misery, as for the most part with men. Therefore as the bird in outward vivacity and mobility has a manifest resemblance to the child, so in the inward qualities of the mind we may reasonably believe that it resembles him. And were the blessings of this age of childhood common to the other ages, and the evils of these not greater than of that, man perchance would have cause to bear life patiently.

In my opinion the nature of birds, if we consider it in certain modes, surpasses in perfection the natures of other animals. By way of example, if we consider that the bird very much excels all the others in the faculties of sight and hearing, which according to the natural order appertaining to the category of living creatures, are the principal senses ; in this way it follows that the nature of the bird is more perfect than are the other natures of the said category. Again, the other animals being, as above written, naturally inclined to rest, and birds to movement ; and movement being more lifeful than rest, life indeed consisting in movement, and birds abounding in exterior movement more than any other animal ; and moreover, sight and hearing, wherein they excel all others, and which predominate among their powers,

being the two senses more special to the living, as also more vivid and mobile both in themselves, and in the habits and other effects produced by them in animals within and without ; and finally considering the other things already mentioned ; the conclusion follows that the bird has greater abundance of life exterior and interior than have the other animals. Now, if life is a thing more perfect than its contrary, at least in living creatures ; and if therefore the greater abundance of life is greater perfection ; in this manner, likewise, it follows that the nature of birds is more perfect. In relation to which it must not be passed in silence that birds are equally fitted to support the extremes of cold and heat, and without an interval of time between the one and the other : since we often observe that from the ground in little more than a moment they ascend through the air to a very great altitude, which is as much as to say to a region beyond measure cold ; and many of them, in a short period, pass on the wing through various climates.

To conclude ; as Anacreon wished he could transform himself into a mirror to be gazed upon continually by her he loved, or into a tunic to cover her, or into ointment to anoint her, or into water to lave her, or into a fillet that she might bind him to her bosom, or into a pearl to be borne on her neck, or into a shoe that at least she might press him with her foot ; similarly I would for a short time be changed into a bird, to experience the contentment and joyfulness of its life.

CANTICLE OF THE WILD COCK

SOME Hebrew writers and masters affirm that between heaven and earth, or, let us say, partly in one and partly in the other, there lives a certain wild cock, whose feet rest on the earth, while its crest and beak

touch heaven. This gigantic cock, besides other peculiarities which are described by the above-mentioned authors, has the use of reason ; or at any rate has been taught like a parrot, by whom I know not, the art of articulate speech. This is proved by the fact that an antique manuscript on parchment has been found, on which, written in Hebrew characters, and in a language compounded of Chaldean, Targumic, Rabbinical, Cabalistic, and Talmudic, is a canticle entitled, *Scir detarnegòl bara letsafru*—that is, ‘Morning Canticle of the Wild Cock.’ This canticle, not without great labour and the consultation of various rabbis, cabalists, theologians, jurists, and Hebrew philosophers, I have succeeded in comprehending and in rendering into the vulgar tongue in the following manner. I have not yet been able to learn whether this canticle is repeated by the cock from time to time, or every morning, or whether it was chanted on one occasion only ; nor who hears it, or has heard it ; nor whether the manuscript gives the proper language of the cock, or is a translation of it into another tongue. In the following rendering, as my object was to produce as faithful a version as possible (and this I have zealously sought to accomplish), I have employed prose rather than verse, notwithstanding the poetical nature of the subject. The abrupt and perhaps sometimes turgid style must not be imputed to me, since it follows closely the original text, which in this respect conforms to the genius of the Oriental languages, and especially of their poetry.

‘Awake, mortals, and rise ! The day returns : truth comes back to earth, and vain dreams depart. Arise : take up again the burden of life ; forsake the world of dreams for the world of reality.

‘Now is the time when men collect and review in their minds all the thoughts of their present life ; recall to memory their designs, studies, and affairs, and foresee the delights and troubles that the new day may bring them. And now all would fain have their minds filled with pleasant thoughts and joyous anticipations. But to few are their desires granted : for all it is an

evil to awaken. The unfortunate are no sooner aroused than they awaken to a sense of their misery. Sweetest of all things is that sleep which joy and hope have combined to procure, and to bless with happy dreams : but their influence, though it may last until the morning, fails or declines with the coming of day.

‘If the sleep of mortals were perpetual, and if to live were to sleep ; if under the daystar all living things remained tranced in perfect rest, and no man went forth to toil ; if no oxen lowed in the meadows, and no wild beasts roared in the forests ; if no birds sang in the air, and there were no murmuring or buzzing of butterflies and bees ; if all things on earth were soundless and motionless, save the waters, the winds, and the tempests ; then indeed the universe would be useless, but would there be less happiness or more misery in it than there now is ? I ask of thee, () Sun, author of day and guardian of our vigils ; hast thou in the course of the many ages which have been measured out by thy rising and setting ever seen a single human being who was truly happy ? Of the innumerable works of men which thou hast seen, dost thou know of even one which has ever fulfilled its object, namely, the satisfaction, durable or transient, of its producer ? Dost thou now see, or hast thou ever seen, happiness anywhere upon earth ? Where dwells it ? In what field, wood, or valley, or on what mountain ; in what region inhabited or desert ; or in what planet of the many which are illumined and warmed by thy flames ? Does it perchance hide from thy view in the depths of caverns, or in the secret places of the earth or sea ? What animated thing, what plant, what being vivified by thee, what creature, provided or unprovided with vegetative or animal life, partakes of it ? And thou thyself, that like an indefatigable giant, careerest day and night, without sleep or repose, over the immeasurable path prescribed to thee ; art thou happy or unhappy ?

‘Mortals, awaken ! Not yet are you free from life. A time will come when no external force, no inward impulse, will arouse you from the quietude of sleep ;

and then you shall repose insatiably and for ever. But not yet is death accorded to you : only from time to time a semblance of it is granted you for a little while ; because without such interruptions of its activities life could not sustain itself. Privation of sleep is a deadly evil, a cause of the sleep eternal. So poor a thing is life, that to preserve it it is necessary every night to lay it down for a time in order to recruit its powers ; to restore it, as it were, by giving it a taste of death.

‘It appears that all things exist only that they may die. That which exists not cannot die, and yet all that exists has sprung from nothingness. It is certain that the ultimate object of existence is not happiness, for nothing is happy. It is true that animated creatures propose this end to themselves in all their actions, but they obtain it from none ; and in their whole existence, always toiling, striving, and enduring, the sole result of their labours and sufferings is to attain that which seems to be Nature’s only object, namely, death.

‘The early morning hours, though they are not indeed happy, are at least the most endurable of the day. Few on awaking find their minds occupied by pleasant and cheering thoughts, but nearly all proceed to create them ; because though they may have no cause for joy, they are then inclined towards it ; and they are then, also, more disposed to endure patiently their misfortunes. Even he who was a prey to despair before sleep overcame him, when he awakes begins once more to hope, however little reason he may have for his hopefulness. At that time many real misfortunes and troubles, many causes of fear and affliction, appear much less formidable than they did the evening before. Often too the sufferings of the previous day are contemned, and almost derided as delusions and vain imaginations. While the evening may be compared to old age, the morning, on the contrary, resembles youth, being for the most part cheerful and confident ; while the evening is sad, discouraged, and inclined to anticipate evil. But this youth which mortals experience each day is the image of the youth

of their lives, brief and fugitive ; as life hastens to its end, so the day hastens towards night.

'Youth, though the best thing that life can bestow, is yet but a wretched gift. And this poor thing fails in so short a time, that when, by many indications, men become aware of their failing vitality, they have hardly realised their possession of it, or been able to make any use of those powers which they feel are now deserting them. For all mortals the greater part of life is a process of decay. So much, in all her works, does Nature tend towards dissolution and death ! For no other reason does old age prevail so manifestly and for so long a time in life and the world. Every part of the universe hastens indefatigably to death, with wonderful solicitude and celerity. Only the world itself appears exempt from decay and destruction ; since, though in autumn and winter it appears to be old and sick, yet in the spring it rejuvenates itself. But just as mortals every morning seem to recover some portion of their youth, yet grow old as the day advances, so also the world, though it appears to grow young again at the beginning of each new year, is not less surely and continuously growing old. The time will come when this universe and Nature herself shall be destroyed. And as of many great and marvellous empires which formerly existed, no traces or records are now left, so of the whole world, and the infinite vicissitudes and calamities of all created things no vestige will remain, but a naked silence and a most profound stillness will fill the immensity of space. Thus this wonderful and terrible mystery of universal existence, before it can be revealed or understood, shall dissolve and perish*.'

* This conclusion is poetic, not philosophic. Speaking philosophically, existence, which never began, will never end. (Author's note.)

DIALOGUE OF TIMANDER AND ELEANDER

T. I wish, and am even bound, to speak to you frankly. The substance and intention of your writing and your conversation appear to me very blameworthy.

E. If my actions do not appear to you so likewise, I shall not grieve much : for talk and writings matter little.

T. In your actions I find nothing to reprehend. I am aware that you do no good to others through not having the power, and I see that you do them no evil through not having the will. But in your talk and writings I believe you very reprehensible ; and I do not concede to you that now these matter little ; for our present life, one may say, scarcely consists of anything else. Let us pass over the talk just now, and speak of the writings. Your continual censures and mockery of mankind, in the first place, are out of fashion.

E. Also my brain is out of fashion. And it is nothing new for the children to resemble their sire.

T. Neither will it be new that your books, like everything contrary to the current mode, prove unsuccessful.

E. Small harm. Not for this will they go seeking bread from door to door.

T. Forty or fifty years ago the philosophers used to speak ill of the human species ; but in this age they do quite the contrary.

E. Do you believe that forty or fifty years ago the philosophers, speaking ill of mankind, uttered falsehood or truth ?

T. Rather and more frequently truth than falsehood.

E. Do you believe that in these forty or fifty years the human species has changed to the contrary of what it was before ?

T. I do not believe this ; but it matters nothing to our present purpose.

E. Wherefore does it not matter? Perhaps the human species has grown in power or ascended in dignity, that the writers of to-day are compelled to extol or bound to honour it?

T. These are jests in a grave argument.

E. Then, returning to seriousness, I am not ignorant that the men of this age, doing evil to their fellows according to the ancient fashion, have nevertheless taken to speak well of them, contrary to the fashion of the preceding age. But I, who do no evil to those like me or unlike me, do not consider myself bound to speak well of them against my conscience.

T. You are, however, bound like all other men to strive to be useful to your species.

E. If my species strives to be the contrary to me, I do not see how I am bound by the obligation you speak of. But suppose that I am bound by it. What must I do if I have no power?

T. You cannot, and few others can, with deeds. But with writings you can and you ought to be useful. And books that continually satirise men in general are not useful ; on the contrary, they do very much harm.

E. I admit that they do no good, but I deny that they do harm. But do you really believe that books can benefit the human race?

T. I not only believe it, but all the world believes it.

E. What books?

T. Of several kinds ; but in particular books of morality.

E. This is not believed by all the world ; for I, among others, do not believe it ; as the lady answered Socrates. If any moral book could be useful, I think that poetic works would be the most useful of all : I say poetic, taking this word in a large sense ; that is, books intended to move the imagination ; and I mean in prose not less than in verse. Now I make little account of that poetry which, read and meditated, does not leave in the mind of the reader a sentiment

so noble, that for half an hour he will be kept by it from admitting a base thought or doing an unworthy action. But if the reader breaks faith to his principal friend an hour after the reading, I do not therefore despise such poetry : for I should thus have to despise the most beautiful, the most enthusiastic, and the most noble poems in the world. And I exclude from this argument all readers living in great cities ; who, even if they read attentively, cannot be benefited for even half an hour, nor much delighted, nor much moved, by any sort of poetry.

T. You speak as usual sarcastically, and in a way that gives one to understand that you are in general badly received and badly treated by others : for in most cases this is the cause of the hatred and contempt which certain persons profess for their own species.

E. In truth I do not assert that mankind have treated me and now treat me very well : especially as in asserting this, I should boast myself to be a unique example. But neither have they done me any great harm : because, not desiring anything of theirs, and not competing with them, I have not much exposed myself to their injuries. Indeed, I declare to you and assure you that, as I most clearly know and see myself unable to do the least part of what is requisite to render oneself agreeable to people ; and in the utmost degree unfit to converse and even to live with others, either through my own fault or that of my nature ; therefore, if mankind treated me better, I should esteem them still less than I do.

T. Then you are so much the more culpable : for hatred and the resolve to wreak, so to say, vengeance upon mankind, having been wrongly injured by them, would have some excuse. But your hatred, as you say yourself, has not any particular cause ; except perhaps an unusual and miserable ambition to acquire the fame of misanthropy, like Timon ; an ambition abominable in itself, and specially alien to the spirit of this age, which is devoted above all to philanthropy.

E. As to ambition, there is no need for me to answer you, since I have already said that I desire nothing from men ; and if this does not seem credible to you, although it is true ; at least you ought to believe that it is not ambition which moves me to write things which in these days, as you yourself affirm, procure vituperation and not applause for him who writes them. As to the hatred against all our species, I am so far from it, that not only I have not the will, but I have not even the power to hate those who injure me personally ; I am utterly unsuited and impenetrable to hate. And this is not a small part of my great ineptitude for practical worldly life. But I cannot amend myself : for I always think that whoever trusts by doing things disagreeable or harmful to anyone else to procure convenience or pleasure for himself is led to injure, not for the sake of doing evil to others (for this properly is not the end of any possible action or thought), but for the sake of doing good to himself, a desire which is natural, and does not merit odium. Besides which, at every vice or fault I see in others, before growing angry I turn to examine myself, supposing myself subject to the same previous events and placed in the same circumstances ; and always finding myself either guilty or capable of the same faults, I have not the heart to be irritated. I always reserve my anger for that time when I shall see a wickedness which could not possibly exist in my nature : but as yet I have not ever seen such. Lastly, the idea of the vanity of all things human continually fills my mind in such a manner that I cannot resolve to go to war for any of them : and anger and hatred appear to me passions much too great and powerful to be in accordance with the tenuity of life. You see what diversity there is between my nature and that of Timon. He hating and avoiding all others, loved and flattered Alcibiades only, as the future cause of many evils to their common country. I, without hating Alcibiades, would have avoided him more than others, warned the citizens of their peril, and helped them to provide against it. Some say that Timon did not hate

men, but wild beasts in human semblance. I do not hate either men or wild beasts.

T. But neither do you love anyone.

E. Listen, my friend. I was born to love, I have loved, and perhaps with affection as intense as can ever exist in a living soul. Now, although I am not yet, as you perceive, of an age naturally cold, nor perhaps even lukewarm, I am not ashamed to declare that I love no one, except myself by necessity of nature, and myself as little as I possibly can. Nevertheless I am wont and ready to choose rather to suffer myself than be the cause of suffering to others. And of this, however little you know of my habits, I believe that you can be my witness.

T. I do not deny it.

E. So that, for my part, I constantly seek for others, postponing even my own interest, that greatest or rather that sole good which I am reduced to desire for myself, that is, freedom from suffering.

T. But you confess formally that you do not love even our species in general?

E. Yes, formally. But as always, if it concerned me, I would have the culpable punished, although indeed I do not hate them; so, were it in my power, I would do any great benefit to my species, although I do not love it.

T. Well, be it so. But in fine, if you are not moved by injuries received, nor by hatred, nor by ambition, what does move you to practise that manner of writing?

E. Divers causes move me. First, intolerance of every simulation and dissimulation: to which I sometimes stoop in talking, but in writing never; for I am often obliged to speak, but I am never compelled to write; and if I had to express that which I do not think, it would give me no satisfaction to distil my brains upon paper. All the wise laugh at him who writes in Latin at present, for no one speaks that language, and few understand it. Just as ridiculous, it appears to me, is the continual supposition, in writing or speaking, of certain human qualities which everyone

knows are no longer to be found in any man born ; and of certain rational or ideal entities revered a long time ago, but now held to be entirely non-existent both by him who names them and by him who hears them named. That persons should use masks and travesties to deceive others, or to go unrecognised, does not appear to me strange : but that all go masked with the same kind of masks, and travestied in the same way, without deceiving one another, and recognising each other perfectly, this seems to me childishness. Let them pull off the masks, and stand in their own clothes ; they will not make less effect than heretofore, and they will be much more at their ease. For, after all, this continual feigning, although useless, and this everlasting representation of a person totally different from a man's self, cannot be accomplished without great embarrassment and weariness. Had men from their primitive state, solitary and wild, reached modern civilisation at one bound and not step by step, can we believe that in their languages even the names of the above-mentioned things would be found, much less the habit among the nations of repeating them every now and then, and of making a thousand discourses about them ? In truth this habit appears to me like one of those antique ceremonies or practices, utterly alien from our modern customs, but which nevertheless maintain themselves by virtue of long routine. But I, who cannot accommodate myself to ceremonies, do not accommodate myself either to this habit ; and I write in modern language, not in language of the times of the Trojans. In the second place, I do not so much seek in my writings to satirise our species as to complain of fate. I believe there is nothing more manifest and palpable than the necessary unhappiness of all the living. If this unhappiness is not veritable, all is false, and we may as well abandon the present and every other argument. If it is veritable, wherefore shall I not be allowed even to lament it openly and freely, and to declare that I suffer ? But if I lamented with weeping (and here is the third cause that moves me), I should weary not a little others and

myself, without any fruit. Laughing at our ills I find some comfort, and endeavour to give some to others in the same way. If I do not succeed in this, I nevertheless hold it for certain that laughter at our ills is the unique profit we can draw from them, and the unique remedy that can be found. The poets say that despair has always a smile on the lips. You must not think that I do not pity human unhappiness. But not being able to cure it with any effort, any art, any industry, any covenant; I esteem it much more worthy of man, and of a magnanimous despair, to laugh at the ills common to us, than to set myself sighing and weeping and wailing along with others, or inciting them to do the same. In the last place, I have to say that I desire as much as you, and as much as anybody, the good of my species universally, but I do not at all hope for it; I cannot take delight in feeding upon certain good expectations, as I see many philosophers do in this age; and my despair, being complete and continual, and founded upon a solid judgment and certitude, does not leave me scope for cheerful dreams and fancies about the future, nor courage to undertake anything with a view to their realisation. And you are well aware that a man does not set himself to attempt what he knows or believes he cannot succeed in; and should he make the attempt works against his will and with great effort; and that writing in a manner diverse from or contrary to one's own opinion, even if this be wrong, one never writes anything worthy of consideration.

T. But it is necessary to reform one's own judgment when it is diverse from the truth, as is yours.

E. I judge, as regards myself, that I am unhappy; and in this I know that I am not deceived. If the others are not unhappy I congratulate them with all my soul. I am also certain that I shall not free myself from unhappiness before I die. If the others have a different hope for themselves, I rejoice similarly that they have it.

T. We all are and all have been unhappy: and I think you cannot wish to boast that this opinion of yours is one of the most novel. But the condition

of mankind can be ameliorated in a vast degree from what it is, as it has already been indescribably ameliorated from what it was. You show that you do not remember, or do not want to remember, that man is perfectible.

E. Perfectible, I will believe on your word; but perfect, which is of greater importance, I know not when I shall have to believe, nor on whose word.

T. He has not yet attained perfection because he has not yet had time; but there can be no doubt that he is to attain it.

E. Nor do I doubt this. The few years that have elapsed from the beginning of the world until now could not suffice; and we must not by them pass judgment on the nature, the destiny, the faculties of man; and besides, he has had other affairs on hand. But now he attends to nothing else than the making our species perfect.

T. Assuredly this is attended to with the greatest diligence in all the civilised world. And considering the abundance and the efficacy of the means, the one and the other incredibly augmented within the last few years, it may be believed that the result must really be obtained in a longer or shorter time: and the hope of this is very beneficial, by reason of the useful enterprises and operations it promotes or produces. Therefore, if it was ever pernicious and reprehensible at any time, at the present time it is most pernicious and abominable to parade your despair; to impress upon men the necessity of their misery, the vanity of life, the imbecility and insignificance of their species, and the wickedness of their nature: teaching which can have no other effect than to prostrate their courage; deprive them of self-esteem, the chief foundation of honest, of useful, of glorious life; and dissuade them from seeking their own good.

E. I wish you would tell me precisely, whether it appears to you that what I say about the unhappiness of man is true or false.

T. You put your hand once more to your usual weapon; and if I confess that what you say is true,

you think you have triumphed in the argument. Now I respond that not every truth is to be preached to everybody or at every time.

E. I pray you, satisfy me as to yet another question. These truths, which I do not preach but speak, are they principal or only accessory truths in philosophy?

T. As for me, I believe that they are the substance of all philosophy.

E. Then greatly deceive themselves those who say and preach that the perfection of man consists in the knowledge of the truth, and that all his ills proceed from wrong opinions and from ignorance; and that the human race shall then finally be happy when all men or the great majority of men shall know the truth, and solely by its laws regulate and govern their life. And these things are said by nearly all the philosophers ancient and modern. In your judgment, behold, the truths which are the substance of all philosophy should be hidden from the greater part of mankind; and I believe that you would willingly consent to have them ignored or forgotten by all: because known and borne in mind they can only do harm. Which is as much as to say that philosophy ought to be rooted out from the world. I am not ignorant that the ultimate conclusion to be drawn from true and perfect philosophy is that we need not philosophise. Whence we may infer that philosophy, in the first place, is useless, because in order to refrain from philosophising there is no need to be a philosopher; secondly, that it is most pernicious, because the said ultimate conclusion is not learnt except at our own cost, and being learnt cannot be put in operation; for it is not in the power of men to forget truths they know, and every other habit is more easy to renounce than that of philosophising. In short, philosophy, hoping and promising at first to cure all our ills, is at last reduced to desire in vain to remedy itself. Granting all this, I ask wherefore we are to believe that the present age is nearer perfection and more fit for it than the ages past? Perhaps by the greater knowledge of truth; which is seen to be altogether

contrary to the happiness of man? Or perhaps because now some few know that we need not philosophy, without, however, being able to abstain from it? But the first men, in fact, did not philosophise, and the savages abstain from doing so without trouble. What other means, either new or greater, which our predecessors had not have we for approximating to perfection?

T. Many, and of great utility; but to expound them would require an infinite discourse.

E. Let us pass them over for the present: and returning to what regards myself, I say that if in my writings I mention any stern and sad truths, either to disburthen my mind or to console myself with a laugh, and not for any other reason; I at the same time do not cease in the same writings to deplore and oppose and dissuade from the study of that miserable and cold truth, the cognition of which is the source either of indifference and slothfulness, or else of baseness of mind, iniquity and dishonesty of action, and perversity of habits: while, on the contrary, I praise and exalt those opinions, though untrue, which generate acts and thoughts noble, energetic, magnanimous, virtuous, and useful to the common or the private weal; those fancies beautiful and joyous, though vain, that give worth to life; the natural illusions of the mind; and, in brief, the ancient errors, very different from barbarous errors; which latter only, and not the former, should be destroyed by the operation of modern civilisation and philosophy. But these, in my opinion, overpassing the bounds (as is natural and inevitable in human affairs) have scarcely risen out of one barbarism when they are precipitated into another, not less than the first, although produced by reason and knowledge, and not by ignorance, and therefore less efficacious and manifest in the body than in the spirit, less vigorous in actions, and, so to say, more secret and intrinsic. I am inclined to believe that the antique errors, so necessary to the well-being of civilised nations, are no less, and every day must become more, impossible to re-create. As to the perfection of man,

I swear to you that if it were already acquired, I would have written at least a volume in honour of the human race. But since I have not happened to behold it, and do not expect to in my life, I am disposed to assign by my will a considerable part of my property to provide that when the human race has become perfect there shall be composed and pronounced publicly a panegyric upon it every year; and that there shall also be erected to it in the ancient style a small temple or a statue, or whatever shall be deemed most appropriate.

COPERNICUS

SCENE I

The First Hour and the Sun

F. H. Good day, your Excellency.

S. Yes; also good night.

F. H. The horses are ready.

S. Good.

F. H. The morning star has come out a little.

S. Good: she may come or go at her pleasure.

F. H. What does your Excellency mean?

S. I mean that I want you to leave me quiet.

F. H. But, your Excellency, the night has already lasted so long that it cannot last any longer; and if we delay, take care, your Excellency, that some confusion does not arise.

S. Let what will arise, for I won't move.

F. H. Oh, your Excellency, what is this? Do you feel unwell?

S. No, no, I feel nothing, except that I will not move; and therefore you had better go about your own affairs.

F. H. How can I go if you do not come? for I am the first hour of the day; and how can the day have

being, if your Excellency will not condescend to come forth as usual?

S. If not of the day, you will be of the night; or the hours of the night will do double duty, and you and your companions will rest at ease. I'll tell you the truth. I am weary of this continual going round to give light to a lot of animalcula, that live upon a handful of mud so minute that I, who have good eyesight, cannot discern it; and I have resolved this night to take no more trouble in the matter; and if men want light, let them keep their fires burning or provide in some other mode.

F. H. And what mode, your Excellency, can the poor little fellows find? It will be an excessive expense if they must feed their lamps and provide candles enough to burn all through the day. Had they already discovered that inflammable air fit to illuminate streets, rooms, shops, cellars, and everything, and all at a trifling expense, I would admit the case to be not quite so bad. But the fact is that three hundred years, more or fewer, have yet to pass ere mankind will discover that remedy; and in the meantime the oil and wax and pitch and tallow will be exhausted and they will have nothing more to burn.

S. Let them go and catch fireflies and glow-worms.

F. H. And how provide against the cold? for without the assistance they have had from your Excellency, the burning of all their forests will not suffice to keep them warm. And, moreover, they will die of hunger; for the earth will no longer bring forth her fruits. And thus in the course of a few years the seed of those poor animals must perish, for when they shall have gone for a short while groping here and there about the earth, seeking something to feed and warm them, finally, everything being exhausted which they could swallow, and the last spark of fire being extinct, they must all die in the dark, frozen like so many bits of rock-crystal.

S. What matters that to me? Am I the wet-nurse of the human race; or the cook that has to season and prepare their food? And why should I care if a certain

small quantity of invisible little creatures, millions of miles away, cannot see and cannot support the cold without my light? And besides, should I even serve, so to speak, as the stove or fire of this human family, it is reasonable that the family wanting to warm itself, should come round the fire, and not that the fire should run about the house. So, if the earth has need of my presence, let her set out herself and take steps to obtain it; as for me, I have no need of anything from the earth to make me seek her.

F. H. Your Excellency means, if I understand rightly, that what you have done in the past, the earth must now do herself?

S. Yes; now, and always for the future.

F. H. Certainly, your Excellency is quite right in this; besides being able to do what you please. Nevertheless, deign to consider, your Excellency, how many beautiful things will necessarily be wasted if you establish this new system. The day will no longer have its beautiful golden chariot with its beautiful horses that bathe in the sea; and, passing over other details, we poor hours will no longer have a place in heaven, and from celestial maidens must become terrestrial; even if we do not soon dissolve away in smoke, as I expect we shall. But be this as it may; the difficulty will be to persuade the earth to go round about, and this will be very difficult: for she is not used to it; and it must appear strange to her to have always to run and tire herself so, never having stirred a step from her place until now. And if your Excellency, as it appears, commences to incline a little to indolence, I hear that the earth is not at all more inclined to activity in these than in the old times.

S. Necessity in this case will goad her, and make her leap and run as much as is wanted. However, the speediest and surest way is to find a poet or a philosopher who will persuade the earth to move herself, or if he cannot induce her otherwise, will make her go by force. For after all, the most of this business is in the hands of the philosophers and the poets; these

can herein do almost anything. It was the poets who aforetime (I was then young and heeded them) with those fine songs of theirs, led me to undertake of my own free will, and by way of amusement or honourable exercise, that absurdest task of running desperately, big and heavy as I am, around a little grain of sand. But now that I am of ripe years, and have turned my attention to philosophy, I seek in everything not beauty but use; and the sentiments of the poets when they do not make me angry make me laugh. I must have good and substantial reasons for doing anything; and as I find no reasons at all for preferring a life of activity to a life of leisurely ease; since the former cannot give any fruit worth the trouble or even the thought (there not being in the world a fruit worth a penny); I have determined to leave the labours and cares to others, while I for my part live at home quiet and doing nothing. This change in me, as I have told you already, besides being partly the effect of age, has been wrought by the philosophers; people who in these times have commenced to increase in influence, and increase more day by day. So that, wishing to make the earth move and run around instead of me; in one respect certainly a poet would be more apt than a philosopher: because the poets, now with one fine story now with another, giving us to understand that the things of the world are of real value and importance, and that they are full of pleasure and beauty, and inspiring a thousand joyous hopes, often persuade others to hard work; and the philosophers dissuade. But on the other hand, since the philosophers have begun to be in the ascendant, I fear that a poet would not be listened to by the earth at present; and even if heeded would produce no effect. And therefore it will be better that we have recourse to a philosopher; for although, indeed, the philosophers are usually little fit and less inclined to incite others to work; it may be that in so extreme a case as this they will for once act contrary to their habitual course. Always excepting that the earth shall judge it more expedient to go straight to perdition than to

fatigue herself thus ; in which case I would not affirm that she was wrong : enough, we shall see what ensues. Therefore you will do one thing ; you will go hence to the earth, or send one of your companions, whichever you please : and if she finds any one of those philosophers who stay out of doors in the cold watching the heavens and the stars, as reasonably she may trust to find through the novelty of the length of this night, without more ado she must lift him up, swing him upon her back, and straight return with him to me here, and I will see how to induce him to do what we want. Do you quite understand ?

F. H. Yes, your Excellency. It shall be done.

SCENE II

Copernicus on the balcony of his house, watching the eastern sky through a tube of paper, telescopes not being yet invented :

A wonderful thing this. Either all the clocks are wrong, or the sun should have risen an hour ago ; and here one sees not even the faintest dawnlight in the east, although the sky is clear and cloudless as a mirror. All the stars are shining as if it were midnight. I must go to my *Almagest* or *Sacrabosco*, and ask for the cause of this. I have often heard men speak of the night that Jove passed with the spouse of *Amphitryon* ; and I also remember to have read not long since in a recent book by a Spaniard, that the *Peruvians* say that once in old times there was in their country a night so long that it seemed interminable, and that at last the Sun came forth out of a certain lake which they call *Titicaca*. But hitherto I have thought such stories mere fairy tales ; and have been firm in this faith, as are all rational men. But now when I see that reason and science, to speak plainly, are not worth a pin, I make up my mind to believe that these and similar tales may be perfectly true. I am even ready to go to all the lakes and marshes

within reach, and see whether I chance to fish up the sun. But what sound is this I hear, like the sound of the wings of a great bird?

SCENE III

The Last Hour and Copernicus

L. H. *Copernicus, I am the last hour.

C. The last hour? Well, one must needs submit. Only, if it be possible, give me time enough to make my will, and put my affairs in order before I die.

L. H. Die? I am not the last hour of life.

C. Oh, what are you then? The last hour of the office of the breviary?

L. H. I certainly believe you like that hour better than the others when you are in the choir.

C. But how do you know that I am a canon? And how do you know me, for you have already called me by my name?

L. H. I have gathered information about you from some people that were below in the street. In short, I am the last hour of the day.

C. Ah, I understand; the first hour is unwell, and hence it is that the day is not visible yet.

L. H. Permit me. The day will not come, either to-day or to-morrow, or ever, if you do not see to it.

C. That would be a fine thing, that I should be charged with making the day!

L. H. I will explain to you how. But in the first place it is necessary that you accompany me to the house of the Sun, my Lord. You will learn more on the way; and part will be told you by his Excellency when we arrive.

C. Very well. But the road, if I am not mistaken, is immensely long. How can I carry provisions enough to keep me from dying with hunger some years before arriving? Add that the estates of his Excellency, to the best of my belief, do not produce what would afford me a single breakfast.

L. H. Lay aside these doubts. You have not to stay long in the house of the Sun, and the journey will be made in a moment; for I am a spirit, if you know it not.

C. But I am a body.

L. H. Well, well, you need not trouble yourself with such arguments, for you are not a metaphysical philosopher. Come, mount upon my shoulders; and leave the rest to me.

C. Courage; it is done. But what will be the end of this adventure?

SCENE IV

Copernicus and the Sun

C. Most illustrious sir.

S. Pardon, Copernicus, that I do not ask you to sit; for we use no seats here. But we shall soon finish. You have already learnt from my handmaid what the business is. I for my part, by what the girl reports to me of your quality, think that you are very fit for what we have to do.

C. My lord, I see many difficulties in this affair.

S. Difficulties should not frighten a man of your sort. It is even said that they increase the courage of the courageous. But of what kind are these difficulties?

C. Firstly, great as is the power of philosophy, I do not feel sure that it is great enough to persuade the earth to set off running instead of remaining comfortably seated; to undertake hard work instead of remaining in idleness; especially in this age, which is not by any means the heroic age.

S. And if you cannot persuade her, you shall force her.

C. Willingly, most Illustrious, were I a Hercules, or even an Orlando, and not a canon of Varmia.

S. What has that to do with it? Is it not recorded of one of your ancient mathematicians that he said he doubted not he could move heaven and earth if a

standing place were given him beyond the world? Now you are not required to move heaven; and behold, you find yourself in the place wanted beyond the earth. Therefore, if you are not inferior to that ancient, you should be able to move her, will she or will she not.

C. My lord, it might be done; but a lever would be required, which would have to be so long that not only I but you, most illustrious lord, however rich you may be, have not what would suffice for half the cost of the material to make it and the cost of the making. Another and graver difficulty is this that I will now state; it is rather a knot of difficulties. The earth until to-day has held the first place in the universe, that is to say the centre; and (as you know) she resting motionless, and without other trouble than to gaze about her, all the other globes of the universe, the greatest no less than the smallest, the fulgent with the obscure, have gone revolving above and under and around her continually, with a swiftness, an assiduity, a vehemence, of which the thought is overwhelming. And thus, all things showing themselves occupied in her service, the universe appeared in the likeness of a court, wherein the earth sat as on a throne, and the other globes around like courtiers and guards and lackeys attended one to one ministry and another to another. So that, in effect, the earth has always accounted herself the Empress of the universe: and truly while things remained as they have done hitherto, it could not be at all affirmed that she reasoned badly; and I will not deny that this conceit of hers had good foundations. What then shall I say of men who repute themselves (as we always shall repute ourselves) more than first and supreme among terrestrial creatures? each of us, even were he clothed in rags, and had he but a crust of dry bread to gnaw, holding himself to be an emperor, not merely of Constantinople or Germany, or of half the earth as were the Roman emperors, but an emperor of the universe; an emperor of the Sun, the planets, the stars visible and invisible; and

the final cause of the stars, of the planets, of your most illustrious lordship, and of all things. But now if we depose the earth from that her central place ; if we make her run and revolve and exert herself continually, doing as much, nor more nor less, as the other globes are doing ; if we make her, in fine, become one of the number of the planets ; this means that her terrestrial majesty and the human majesties must abdicate the throne and resign the empire ; their rags alone and their miseries, which are not few, being left to them.

S. What would you conclude in sum from this discourse, my dear Sir Nicholas ? You have a scruple of conscience, perhaps, that this would be high treason ?

C. No, most Illustrious ; for neither the codes nor the digest, nor the books that treat of public right, or of the right of the empire, or of that of the people, or of that of nature, make any mention of this high treason, so far as I remember. But I would say in substance, that this affair of ours will not be so merely material as it seems to be at first sight, and that its effects will not appertain solely to physics ; for it will confound the grades of the dignities of things and the order of beings, will change the ends of the creatures ; and thus make a very great revolution in metaphysics also, and in all that relates to the speculative part of science. And it will result that men, supposing they have the power and the will to reason sanely, must find themselves quite another thing than that which they have been until now, or that which they have imagined themselves to be.

S. My child, these things give me not any fear ; for I have just as much respect for metaphysics as for physics, and as much also for alchemy or necromancy if you like. And men will content themselves with being that which they are ; and if this does not please them they will go on reasoning upside down, and arguing in despite of the evidence of facts, as they are always able to do ; and in this manner they will continue to account themselves whatever they wish to

be, barons, or dukes, or emperors, or anything they please; for they will thus be more comforted, and these judgments of theirs will not give me the slightest displeasure in the world.

C. Enough, let us leave mankind and the earth. But consider, most Illustrious, what we may expect to come to pass with the other planets. For when they see the earth do everything which they do, and become one of them, they will no longer be content to rest so bare, simple and unadorned, so desert and sad, as they have always been, letting the earth alone have so many ornaments; they also will want their rivers, their seas, their mountains, their plants, and among other things, their animals and inhabitants; not seeing any reason whatever why they should be in anything inferior to the earth. And behold here another immense revolution in the universe; and an infinity of new families and populations, which in a moment we shall see spring up on all sides like fungi.

S. And you can let them spring up, and be as many as they will: for my light and heat will be sufficient for all; without my increasing the expenditure; and the universe will have enough to feed, clothe, lodge, and entertain it liberally, without getting into debt.

C. But let your most illustrious lordship consider a little further, and you will see another confusion arise. For the stars, seeing that you have taken to sit down, and not upon a stool but on a throne, and that you have about you this fine court and subject population of planets, not only will want to sit down also and rest themselves, but will likewise want to reign: and, as to reign one must have subjects, they will want to have their planets as you have yours, everyone his own. And these new planets will also have to be adorned and inhabited as is the earth. And here I will not stop to speak of the poor human race, become little more than nothing already in relation to this system alone; to what they will be reduced when so many thousands of other systems burst forth, so that not the minutest starspeck of the milky way but shall have its own. But considering solely your own interests,

I remark that always until now you have been if not first, assuredly second in the universe, that is to say next to the earth, and have not had any equal ; for the stars have not had the audacity to compare with you ; but in this new state of the universe you will have as many equals as there will be stars with their systems. Therefore, look to it that this mutation we wish to effect be not to the prejudice of your own dignity.

S. Do you not remember what your Cæsar said, when in crossing the Alps he happened to pass near that little hamlet of certain poor barbarians : that he would rather be the first in that hamlet than the second in Rome ? And similarly I would rather be the first in this our system than second in the universe. But it is not ambition that moves me to wish to change the present state of things : it is solely the love of quiet, or, to speak more properly, indolence. So that about having equals or not, or being in the first or the last place, I care very little, because, unlike Cicero, I have more regard for ease than for dignity.

C. This ease, most illustrious, I for my part will exert myself to the best of my power to obtain for you. But I fear, even supposing it obtained, that it will not endure very long. And firstly, I am almost sure that before many years have passed you will be constrained to go whirling round like the pulley of a well, or like a millstone, without changing your place, nevertheless. Then I have some suspicion that at last, at the end of a longer or shorter time, you will find it expedient to begin running again ; I do not say around the earth ; but what will this matter to you ? and perhaps that same revolving upon yourself which you will execute will serve for argument to make you also progress. Enough, be this as it may ; notwithstanding every difficulty and every other consideration, if you persist in your design, I will endeavour to serve you ; so that, if the thing does not get done, you may believe that I lack the power, and not say that I lacked courage.

S. That is well, my dear Copernicus ; try.

C. There remains only a certain difficulty.

VENDOR OF ALMANACS AND PASSER-BY 273

S. Quick ; what is it ?

C. That I do not wish for this affair to be burned alive in the manner of the phoenix ; for should this happen, I am certain not to arise from my ashes as does that bird, and certain never more to see from that hour forward the face of your lordship.

S. Listen, Copernicus ; you know that once upon a time when your philosophers had scarcely begun to exist, I mean in the times when the poets bore sway, I was reputed to be a prophet. I desire that you now permit me to prophesy for the last time, and that in remembrance of my antique power you believe me. I declare to you, then, that perhaps after you, to some who shall approve this that you shall have done, a roasting or other like thing may happen ; but that yourself on account of this enterprise, so far as I can discern, shall not suffer anything. And if you would be more safe, adopt this plan ; dedicate the book which you write on this subject to the Pope*. In this manner I promise you that you will not even lose your canonry.

DIALOGUE BETWEEN A VENDOR OF ALMANACS AND A PASSER-BY

V. Almanacs, new almanacs ; new calendars. Want any almanacs, sir ?

P. Almanacs for the new year ?

V. Yes, sir.

P. Do you believe that this new year will be a happy one ?

V. Oh, your honour, yes, certainly.

P. As the past year ?

* Copernicus in fact dedicated it to Pope Paul III.
(Author's note.)

V. More, much more.

P. As the previous one?

V. More, more, your honour.

P. As what other, then? Would it not please you to have the new year like some one of these last years?

V. No, sir, it would not please me.

P. How many new years have passed since you began to sell almanacs?

V. Twenty years, your honour.

P. Which of these twenty years would you like the coming year to resemble?

V. I? I don't know.

P. Do you remember no one year in particular that seemed to you happy?

V. No in truth, your honour.

P. And yet life is a fine thing. Is not this true?

V. That we all know.

P. Would you not return to live those twenty years, and indeed all the past time, commencing from your birth?

V. Ah, my dear sir, would to God that I could.

P. But if you had to live again the life you have lived, neither more nor less, with all the pleasures and pains you have passed through?

V. That I would not wish.

P. Oh, what other life would you live again? the life I have lived, or that of the prince, or of whom else? Or do you not believe that I or the prince or anyone else would answer exactly like you; and that having to live again the very same life he had lived, no one would wish to turn back?

V. That I believe.

P. Nor would you turn back with this condition, not being able otherwise?

V. No, sir, indeed, I would not return.

P. Oh, what life would you wish then?

V. I would wish such a life as God might send me, without other conditions.

P. A life of chance, of which you know nothing

VENDOR OF ALMANACS AND PASSER-BY 275

else beforehand, as you know nothing of the new year*?

V. Exactly.

P. I would wish the same, too, if I had to live again, and so would all. But this is a sign that always up to the new year chance has treated all badly. And it is clear that everyone is of opinion that the evil he has met with has been more or of more weight than the good; if on the condition of living again the former life with all its evil and all its good, no one would wish to be born again. That life which is a fine thing, is not the life we know, but the life we know not; not the past life, but the future. With the new year, chance will commence to treat well you and me and all the others, and the happy life will begin. Is not this true?

V. Let us hope so.

P. Then show me the finest almanac you have.

V. Here it is, your honour. That is worth fifteen pence.

P. Here are fifteen pence.

V. Thanks, your honour: may we meet again. Almanacs, new almanacs; new calendars.

* There is ambiguity here, as in most dialogues. Vendor thinks of living his life over again, *knowing everything that is unhappy in it*; but living his real life again he would have no such knowledge, and the life *would be a life of chance to him*. Of course the query remains whether one would choose even thus (foreseeing in moment of choice, to forget should he choose) to live as he has lived.—*Translator's note*.

DIALOGUE BETWEEN PLOTINUS AND PORPHYRY

‘Once when I, Porphyry, had the intention of leaving life, Plotinus perceived this ; and having come to me unexpectedly when I was at home, and told me that such a thought did not spring from the reasoning of a sane mind, but from some hypochondriac indisposition, he urged me to travel for change.’—*Porphyry in the Life of Plotinus. The like in that of Porphyry written by Eunapius, who adds that Plotinus expanded in a book the arguments used with Porphyry on that occasion.*

Plotinus. Porphyry, you know that I am your friend, and you know how much, and you must not be surprised if I remark your acts and your talk and your state with a certain curiosity ; because this arises from the fact that my heart clings to you. It is now many days that I have seen you very sad and thoughtful ; you have a certain look, and you let slip certain words : in fine, without other preamble and without circumlocution, I believe that you have in your mind a bad intention.

Porphyry. Of what sort do you mean ?

Plotinus. A bad intention against yourself. It is accounted of evil omen to name the act. Come, my dear Porphyry, do not withhold from me the truth : do not commit this wrong against the great love we have borne each other so long. I know well that I displease you in urging you to this conversation ; and I understand that you would have wished to keep your intention hidden ; but in a matter of such moment I cannot remain silent ; and you should not be unwilling to confer with one who wishes your good as he wishes his own. Let us discuss together quietly, and think over the reasons : you shall disburthen

your mind with me, complain, lament; for I merit this of you: and after all I am certainly not disposed to hinder you from doing what we shall find reasonable, and beneficial for you.

Porphyry. I have never refused you anything you demanded of me, my dear Plotinus. And I now confess to you what I would fain have kept secret, and what I would not confess to another for anything in the world; I avow that what you imagine as to my intention is the truth. If it please you that we set ourselves to reason over this matter, although it is very repugnant to me, because such deliberations seem to prefer the most profound silence, and the mind engaged in such thoughts loves to be solitary and self-contained more than ever, I am prepared even in this to do as you like. I will even myself begin and declare to you that this my inclination does not proceed from any misfortune which has happened to me, or which I expect to overtake me; but from a disgust for life; from a tedium I endure, so intense that it resembles a pain or spasm; from a certain not merely knowledge, but sight, taste, touch of the vanity of everything that occurs to me throughout the day. So that not only my intellect, but all my feelings, even those of the body, are (to speak in a strange style, but befitting the case) full of this vanity. And here in the first place you will not be able to declare that this my disposition is not reasonable: although I will readily admit that in a great measure it results from some corporeal malady. But nevertheless it is most reasonable: in fact all the other dispositions of men, with which, in whatever manner, they live, and think that life and human things have some substance, are more or less remote from reason, and are founded on some illusion or false imagination. And nothing is more rational than life-weariness. Pleasures are all vain. Suffering itself, I speak of that of the mind, is vain: for if you look into the cause and occasion, and consider it well, it is of little or no reality. The like I assert of fear; the like of hope. Life-weariness alone, which is always the fruit of the vanity of things,

is never vanity, never illusion ; is never founded upon falsehood. And it may be affirmed, all the rest being vain, that what the life of man has of substantial and real reduces itself to and consists of life-weariness.

Plotinus. Be it so. I do not wish now to contradict you on this point. But we must first consider the deed you are designing : consider it more closely, and in itself. I will not dwell upon the dictum of Plato, which you know, that it is not lawful for man, like a fugitive slave, to withdraw himself on his own authority from this species of prison in which he finds himself by the will of the Gods ; that is, to spontaneously renounce life.

Porphyry. I beg you, my dear Plotinus, to leave aside Plato for the present, and his doctrines and phantasies. It is one thing to extol and expound and defend certain opinions in the schools and in the books, and another thing to follow them practically. In the school and in books, it may have been lawful for me to approve the sentiments of Plato and follow them ; since such is the usage at present : in life, so far from approving, I rather abominate them. I know it is said that Plato, in his works, promulgated those doctrines of the future life, in order that men, falling into doubt and anxiety concerning their state after death ; through that incertitude, and through fear of future penalties and calamities, should restrain themselves in life from committing injustice and from other ill-doing. For if I thought that Plato was the author of such doubts and beliefs, and that they were his inventions, I would say : You see, Plato, how Nature or Fate or Necessity, or whatever power be the author and ruler of the universe, has been and is perpetually inimical to our species. Many, nay numberless reasons will be valid to dispute that supremacy which we, by other titles, arrogate to ourselves among animals ; but no reason will be found to strip us of that pre-eminence which most ancient Homer attributed to us, the pre-eminence of unhappiness. Still Nature allotted us, as the remedy for all evils, death ; which, by those who did not use much the reasoning of the intellect, would

be little feared ; by the others would be desired. And the expectation and thought of our end should be a most sweet comfort in our life, full of so many pains. You, with this terrible doubt evoked by you in the minds of men, have taken from this thought all sweetness, and made it the most bitter of any. You are the occasion that we now see most unhappy mortals fear the port more than the tempest ; and shrink back with the mind from their sole remedy and rest, into the present pangs and spasms of life. You have been to man more cruel than Fate or Necessity or Nature has been. And as this doubt cannot be in any mode solved, nor our minds ever be freed from it, you have reduced for evermore your fellows to this condition, that their death is full of anguish and more wretched than life. Since by your act, while all the other animals die without any dread, peace and security of mind are perpetually excluded from the last hour of man. This was wanting, O Plato, to the extreme unhappiness of the human race.

I pass over the fact that the result at which you aimed, the restraining men from violence and injustice, has not been effected. For those doubts and beliefs terrify all men in their last hours, when they are not fit to do harm : in the course of life they frequently terrify the good, who have the will not to do harm but to benefit ; they terrify persons timid and weak in body, who are neither disposed by nature, nor sufficiently strong in heart and hand, to work violence and iniquity. But the bold and the robust, and those who feel little the power of imagination ; in fine, those for whom in general another curb is required than that of the mere law ; these are not thus terrified nor held back from wrong doing ; as we see by daily examples, and as the experience of all ages from your times until now makes manifest. Good laws, and especially good education, and the culture of habits and minds, conserve in human society justice and gentleness : because minds polished and softened by a little civilisation, and accustomed somewhat to consider things, and to employ the understanding a little, almost necessarily

and almost always^e shrink with abhorrence from attacking the persons and shedding the blood of their fellows ; are for the most part averse from doing injury to others in any mode ; and rarely and with difficulty can be induced to run those risks attached to the contravention of the laws. But this good result is not wrought by threatening imaginations, and sad beliefs of things fierce and frightful ; rather, as generally results from the multitude and cruelty of the punishments used in states, so also these increase on the one hand cowardice of mind, and on the other ferocity, the principal enemies and pests of human society.

But you have moreover held out and promised a recompense to the good. What recompense ? A state that appears to us full of tedium (*noia*), and still less tolerable than this life. The bitterness of your punishments is manifest to everybody ; but the sweetness of your rewards is hidden and mysterious, and such as cannot be comprehended by the mind of man. Whence such rewards can have no power to attract us to rectitude and virtue. And indeed, if very few bad men through fear of your terrible Tartarus abstain from any evil action, I venture to affirm that never was any good man, in his least act, moved to do well through desire for your Elysium. For it cannot to our imagination have the semblance of desirability. And besides that even the certain expectation of this good would be of very little comfort, what hope have you left that even the virtuous and the just can have it, if your Minos and Æacus and Rhadamanthus, judges most rigid and inexorable, do not pardon the faintest shadow or vestige of fault ? And what man is there who can feel or believe himself so clean and pure as you require ? Wherefore the obtaining that felicity, whatever it may be, comes to be almost impossible : and the consciousness of the most upright and laborious life will not be sufficient to assure a man at last from the uncertainty of his future state, and from the terror of chastisements. Thus through your doctrines, fear, surpassing hope by an infinite interval, is made

the lord of man : and the fruit of these doctrines ultimately is this : that the human race, a wonderful example of unhappiness in this life, expects, not that death is the end of its miseries, but to have to exist after death much more unhappy. Whereby you have outdone in cruelty not only Nature and Fate, but every tyrant the most ferocious, and every murderer the most pitiless, that has been in the world.

But with what barbarities can be compared your decree that it is not lawful for man to put an end to his sufferings, his woes and torments, by vanquishing the horror of death, and voluntarily yielding up his spirit? Certainly the desire to terminate life does not exist in the other animals, because their infelicities have more narrow bounds than have the infelicities of man : nor would the courage exist to destroy it spontaneously. But if such dispositions fell in the nature of the brutes, they would have no obstacle to the choice of dying ; no prohibition, no doubt would take from them the power of withdrawing themselves from their ills. Behold, you render us in this point also, inferior to the beasts, and that liberty which the brutes would have if they had occasion to use it, that which Nature herself, to us so niggardly, has not denied us is through you lost to man. So that the only race of living creatures which finds itself capable of the desire of death, is the only one which has not death in its choice. Nature, fate, and fortune scourge us to bleeding continually, to our inestimable injury and pain : you come, and tie our arms tightly, and fetter our feet, so that it may not be possible for us to ward off, or draw back from their blows. Indeed, when I consider the vastness of human infelicity, I think that we ought to lay the blame of it upon your doctrines more than upon anything else ; and that men ought to complain of you much more than of nature ; which although, to speak the truth, it did not allot us any other than the most unhappy life, yet, on the other hand, gave us the power to finish such life whenever we pleased. And firstly, that misery cannot be called very great, which at my sole will may be of

briefest duration. Secondly, although in effect a person might not resolve to leave life, the sole thought of being able whenever he pleased to withdraw himself from misery, would be such a consolation and such an alleviation of any calamity whatsoever, that by virtue of it all calamities would become easy to support. So that the intolerable weight of our unhappiness must be chiefly derived from nothing else than this doubt whether perchance, voluntarily cutting off our own life, we shall not incur greater misery than the present. Nor only greater, but of such ineffable atrocity and length, that although the present is certain and those torments uncertain, yet reasonably must the dread of those, beyond all proportion or comparison, outweigh the feeling of every ill whatever of this life. This doubt, O Plato, it was indeed easy for you to excite; but the race of men shall perish before it can be resolved. Therefore no other thing has had birth, nothing ever will have birth, so calamitous and fatal to mankind, as your genius.

These things I would say if I believed that Plato was the author or inventor of these doctrines; which I know perfectly well he was not. But at any rate, enough has been said on this matter, and I would wish that we put it aside.

Plotinus. Porphyry, I truly love Plato, as you know. But not therefore would I speak by authority; especially with you, and on such a question; but I would speak by reason. And if I have touched thus cursorily upon that Platonic opinion, I have done so rather to use it as a sort of preamble than for aught else. And resuming the argument I had in my mind, I say that not Plato nor any other philosopher only, but Nature herself appears to teach us that it is not a lawful thing to remove ourselves from the world of our own mere will. I need not expatiate upon this point; for if you will think a little, it cannot be but you will yourself recognise that to kill one's self with one's own hand without necessity, is against nature. Indeed, to speak better, it is the act most contrary to nature that can be committed. For the whole order of things would

be subverted, if all living creatures destroyed themselves. And there seems to be a repugnancy in this, that one should avail himself of life to extinguish that very life; that being should minister to us non-being. Besides which, if anything at all is enjoined and commanded us by nature, it certainly commands us most strictly and above all, and not only men, but equally every other creature in the universe, to attend to self-preservation, and to strive for this in all ways; which is the exact contrary of killing self. And without other arguments, do we not feel that our constitution in and by itself makes us hate death, and fear it, and have it in horror, even in our own despite? Now, therefore, since this act of suicide is contrary to nature, and so contrary as we see, I cannot persuade myself that it is lawful.

Porphyry. I have already considered all this: for, as you have said, it is impossible for the mind not to perceive it, however little one pauses to think upon this subject. It seems to me that one can respond to your reasons with many others, and in several ways: but I will study to be brief. You doubt whether it is lawful for us to die without necessity: I ask you whether it is lawful for us to be unhappy? Nature prohibits suicide. It would be strange to me that she, not having the will or the power to make me either happy or free from misery, should have the power to oblige me to live. Certainly, if Nature has engendered in us the love of self-preservation, and hatred of death, she has given us no less hatred of unhappiness, and love of our well-being; rather, so much greater and more supreme these latter inclinations than those, inasmuch as felicity is the end of all our love and hate; and as death is not shunned nor life loved for itself, but in relation to and love of our well-being, and hatred of our evil and harm. How then can it be contrary to Nature, that I flee from unhappiness in the only way that men can flee from it? which is that of withdrawing myself from the world: since while I am alive I cannot avoid it. And how can it be true that Nature forbids me to devote myself to death, which

without any doubt is good for me, and to repudiate life which manifestly is for me noxious and evil, since it cannot avail me to aught but suffering, and to this necessarily condemns me and leads me in fact?

Plotinus. At all events, these things do not persuade me that suicide in itself is not contrary to Nature; for our feelings bear too clear a contrariety to and abhorrence of death; and we observe that the beasts, which (when they are not forced or misguided by men) behave in everything naturally, not only never commit this act, but even, however tormented and miserable they may be, show themselves most alien to it. And in fine, there is not found, except among men alone, any animal that commits it: and not any man among those peoples who have a natural mode of life; for of such none will be found who do not abominate it, if indeed they have any knowledge or imagination of it; but it is committed solely among such as ourselves, debased and corrupted, who do not live according to nature.

Porphry. Well, I am willing to concede to you that this action is contrary to nature, as you will have it. But what does this avail, if we are not natural creatures, so to express it? I mean we civilised men*. Compare us, I do not say with any other species of living creatures you like, but with the nations of parts of India and Ethiopia, who, as it is said, still preserve their primitive and wild habits, and it will hardly appear to you possible to affirm that these men and those are creatures of one and the same species. And this our transformation, as it were; this change of life, and especially of mind, I for my part have always

* The opinions of the nineteenth century differ very much from those of Porphyry with regard to the natural state and civilisation. But such difference implies merely a dispute as to names in what concerns the arguments of Porphyry for voluntary death. Terming improvement or perfecting or progress that which Porphyry terms corruption, and improved or perfected nature that which he terms inferior nature, the value of his arguments would not be at all diminished. (Author's note.)

firmly believed has not taken place without infinite increase of unhappiness. Assuredly those barbarous nations never feel a desire to end their life; nor does it ever cross their fancy that death could be desired; whereas men accustomed to our mode of existence, and, as we say, civilised, desire it very often, and some bring it upon themselves. Now if it is lawful for the civilised man both to live unnaturally, and unnaturally to be so miserable, wherefore shall it not be lawful for him to die unnaturally? since from this new misery, which results to us from the alteration of our condition, we cannot otherwise free ourselves than by death. For as to our returning to our primitive state, and to the life nature designed for us, this could scarcely be done, and perhaps could not be done at all, with regard to the extrinsic; and with regard to the intrinsic, which is of more importance, without any doubt it would be altogether impossible. What is less natural than medicine? both that which is practised by hand, and that which operates by means of drugs. For the one and the other, for the most part, as well in the operations they perform as in the materials, the instruments, and the methods they use, are as far as can be from nature, and the brutes and savages know them not. Nevertheless, because the diseases likewise which it is their purpose to cure are unnatural, and only exist through the civilisation, that is, the corruption of our state, therefore, these arts, although not natural, are esteemed useful and even necessary. So with this act of suicide, which liberates us from the unhappiness brought upon us by corruption; it does not follow that it is reprehensible, because it is contrary to nature: unnatural evils requiring an unnatural remedy. And it would be hard and unjust that reason, which to make us more miserable than we are naturally is wont to oppose nature in other things, should in this confederate with her, to take from us that last refuge remaining to us—the only one that reason itself points out—and compel us to continue in our misery.

The truth is this, Plotinus. That primitive nature

of the antique men, and of the savage and uncultivated tribes, is no longer our nature; but habitude and reason have formed in us another nature, which we have and always shall have in place of the first. It was not natural to man in the beginning voluntarily to bring death upon himself; but also it was not then natural to desire death. Now both of these are natural—that is, conformable to our new nature—which tending and advancing necessarily, as did the old, toward what appears to be best for us, makes us often desire and seek that which truly is the greatest good for man, death. Nor is this strange; because this second nature is governed and guided for the most part by reason, which affirms most positively that death, so far from being truly an evil, as the primitive impression dictates, is indeed the sole effectual remedy for our evils, the thing most desirable for man, and the best. Therefore I demand: do civilised men measure their other actions by primitive nature? when, and what actions ever? Not by primitive nature, but by this our other nature, or let us say by reason. Wherefore should this sole act of suicide be measured, not by the new nature or reason, but by the primitive nature? Wherefore must the primitive nature, which no longer gives law to our life, give law to our death? Wherefore should not reason govern our death, since it rules our life? And we see that in fact reason and the infelicity of our present state, not only extinguish, especially in the unfortunate and afflicted, that innate abhorrence of death you spoke of, but change it into desire and love, as I have before said. Such desire and love having been produced, which according to nature could not have been produced; and the unhappiness existing, engendered by our alteration, and not commanded by nature; it would be manifest repugnancy and contradiction that the natural prohibition of suicide should still obtain. This seems to me enough to settle whether suicide is lawful. It remains to determine whether it is beneficial.

Plotinus. As to this there is no need for you to

speak, my dear Porphyry; since if this action is lawful (for I do not allow that one which is not just and right can be of benefit), I have not any doubt that it is most beneficial. For the question in brief reduces itself to this: which of the two is better; not to suffer, or to suffer? I know well that enjoyment combined with suffering would probably be chosen by nearly all men rather than no suffering and also no enjoyment; so great is the desire, and so to say, the thirst, that the mind has for enjoyment. But the deliberation does not fall between these terms: for enjoyment and pleasure, to speak precisely and accurately, are as impossible as suffering is inevitable. And I mean suffering no less continual than the continual desire and want we have for enjoyment and happiness, and which are never fulfilled: putting aside also the particular and accidental sufferings which befall every man, and which are equally certain; that is, it is certain such must befall (more or fewer, and of one quality or another) even in the most prosperous life in the world. And in truth, a single and brief suffering, which a person should be sure must happen to him, if he continued to live, would be sufficient, according to reason, to make death preferable to life: because such suffering would not have any compensation whatever; as there cannot occur in our life a real good or satisfaction.

Porphyry. It appears to me that life-weariness (*noia*) in itself, and the finding one's self without hope of better condition or fortune, are causes sufficient to engender the desire to terminate life, even in one whose condition and fortune are not only not bad, but prosperous. And I have very often wondered that we nowhere see mention made of princes who have resolved to die through tedium solely, and through satiety with their peculiar condition; as of private persons we both read and hear every day. Such were those who having heard Egesinus, the Cyrenaic philosopher, give those lectures of his on the misery of life, issuing from the school, went and killed themselves; whence this Egesinus got the nickname of *the persuader to die*;

and it is said, as I believe you know, that at last the King Ptolemy forbade him to discuss that subject any further. For although some sovereigns are found, as Mithridates, Cleopatra, Otho the Roman, and perhaps a few others, who killed themselves; these did so through then finding themselves in adversity and misery, and in order to escape yet more grievous sufferings. Now to me it would have appeared credible that princes more easily than others should conceive hatred for their condition, and disgust for all things, and should desire to die. Because being at the summit of what is called human felicity; having few others to hope for, or perhaps none, of what are termed the good things of life (since they possess all): they cannot promise themselves a to-morrow better than to-day. And always the present, however prosperous, is sad and disagreeable: only the future can delight. But however this may be, we may know in fine that (except the fear of the things of another world) what holds back men so that they do not spontaneously abandon life, and what induces them to love it, and to prefer it to death, is nothing but a simple and most manifest error, so to speak, of computation and measurement: that is, an error made in computing, measuring, and comparing with each other the benefits or the harms: which error obtains, it may be said, as many times as are the moments in which each person embraces life, or consents to live and is contented with life, be it in judgment and will, or be it in practice only.

Plotinus. Thus it is in truth, my dear Porphyry. But with all this, permit that I counsel you, and even suffer that I beseech you, to give ear, concerning this design of yours, rather to nature than to reason. And I mean to that primitive nature, to that mother of us and of the universe, who although she has not shown love for us, and although she has made us unhappy, yet has been to us much less inimical and maleficent than we have been with our own mind, with our continual and unbounded curiosity, our speculations, our reasonings, our dreams, our miserable opinions and doctrines; and especially, she has sought to remedy our unhappi-

ness by hiding from us or transfiguring to us the greater part of it. And although our alteration is vast, and the power of nature is lessened in us; yet this is not reduced to nothing, nor are we so altered and made new that there does not remain in every one much of the old man. And this, in despite of our foolishness, never can be otherwise. Behold, what you call error of computation, really error, and no less great than palpable, is yet committed continually; and not only by the stupid and idiotic, but by the subtle, the learned, the wise; and will be committed for ever, if nature herself, who has produced our race, do not put an end to it, instead of waiting for its extinction by the reason and hand of men themselves. And believe me, there is no disgust for life, nor desperation, nor sense of the nullity of all things, of the vanity of care, of the loneliness of man, nor hatred of the world and of self, which can last long: although these dispositions of the mind are most reasonable, and their contraries are unreasonable. Nevertheless, a short time having passed, and the disposition of the body having slightly changed; little by little, and very often suddenly, through occasions the most petty and scarcely possible to remark, the taste for life is formed again, this and the other fresh hope is conceived, and human affairs resume their former semblance, and appear not unworthy of some care; not truly to the intellect; but certainly, in a manner of speaking, to the sense of the mind. And this suffices to the result of making the person, although knowing well and persuaded of the truth, in spite of reason both continue in life and proceed in it as do others: because the sense I speak of (it may be said) and not the intellect, is the ruling power.

Let suicide be reasonable; let the accommodating the mind to life be unreasonable; certainly the former is a fierce and inhuman act. And it should not please more, nor be chosen rather, to be in accordance with reason a monster, than in accordance with nature a man. And why also shall we not have some consideration for our friends; for our relatives; for our

children, brothers and sisters, parents and wives; for the persons of our household, with whom we have been long accustomed to live: all of whom we must in dying leave for ever: and shall we not feel in our heart any anguish at this separation; nor take account of what they will feel, both for the loss of one dear and familiar, and for the horror of the case? I know well that the mind of a wise man must not be too soft; nor let itself be so overcome by pity and anguish that he be thereby perturbed, that he fall to the ground, that he yield and faint, like the vile who forget themselves in immoderate tears and acts unbecoming the firmness of him who has full and clear knowledge of our human state. But this strength of mind should be used in those sad accidents which come from fortune, and which cannot be avoided, and should not be abused by depriving ourselves voluntarily of the sight, the conversation, the companionship of those dear to us. To reckon as nothing the grief for the separation and loss of relatives, intimate friends, companions, or to be incapable of feeling such grief, is not wisdom, but barbarity. To make no account of grieving friends and the home circle by suicide, is to be careless of others, and over-careful of self. And in truth, he who kills himself has not any care or thought for others; seeks nothing but his own good; casts, so to say, behind him his kindred and all the human race: so that in this action of renouncing life appears the most manifest, the most sordid, and certainly the least beautiful and generous love of self, that is to be found in the world.

Lastly, my dear Porphyry, the troubles and evils of life, although many and continual, yet when, as is the case with you at present, there are no extraordinary misfortunes or calamities, or sharp bodily sufferings, are not difficult to endure; especially to a wise and strong man like you. And life is a thing of so little moment, that a man, as regards himself, should not be very anxious either to retain or to leave it. Therefore, without caring to ponder the matter too curiously; for every slight cause that presents itself for adopting

the former rather than the latter alternative, he should not refuse to do so. And when a friend prays him to do so, wherefore should he not comply? Now I pray you affectionately, my Porphyry, by the memory of the years our friendship has lasted, abandon that thought; do not resolve to cause such great grief to your good friends, who love you with all their soul; to me, who have no one more dear, no companionship more delightful. Resolve rather to aid us in supporting life, than, without other care for us, to leave us in confusion. Let us live, my Porphyry, and together comfort each other; let us not refuse to bear that part which destiny has assigned to us of the evils of our race. Let us continue in association; and proceed encouraging each other, and mutually giving help and support; in order to fulfil as best we may the task of life. Which without any doubt will be brief. And when death shall come, we will not lament: and likewise in our last hours friends and companions will comfort us, and we shall be cheered by the thought that when we are no more they will often remember us and love us still.

DIALOGUE BETWEEN TRISTAN AND A FRIEND

F. I have read your book. Melancholy as is your wont.

T. Yes, as is my wont.

F. Melancholy, disconsolate, desperate; it is clear that this life seems to you a very vile thing (*gran brutta cosa*).

T. What shall I say to you? I then had a fixed idea that human life is unhappy.

F. Unhappy, yes it may be. But yet after all . . .

T. No, no, rather most happy. I have now changed

my opinion. But when I wrote that book I had that folly in my head, as I tell you. And I was so persuaded of its truth, that I would have expected anything rather than to have the observations which I made relative to it brought into doubt, believing that the consciousness of every reader must bear ready witness to each of them. I imagined that disputes might arise solely as to the utility or harmfulness of such observations, never as to their truth: indeed, I thought that my mournful words, the evils being common to all, would be re-echoed in the heart of every one who heard them. And then hearing denied not any particular proposition but the whole, and asserted that life is not unhappy, and that if it appeared so to me this must be the effect of infirmity, or of some other misery special to myself, I at first remained astonished, stupefied, motionless as a stone, and for several days believed that I was in some other world; then I laughed and said: Men in general are like husbands, who, if they would live tranquil, must believe their wives faithful, each his own, and thus they do, even when half the world knows that the truth is quite otherwise. If any one desires or is compelled to live in a certain country, it behoves him to believe the same one of the best in the habitable world; and such he believes it. Men universally, wishing to live, had better believe life beautiful and valuable, and such they believe it, and grow angry with any one who thinks otherwise. Because in effect the human race always believes, not what is true, but what is or appears to be best adapted to itself. The human race, which has believed and will believe so many silly things, will never believe either that it knows nothing, or that it is nothing, or that it has nothing to hope for. No philosopher who should teach one of these three things would have success or establish a school, particularly among the common people: because, besides that all three are little suited to one who would live, the first two offend the pride of man; the third, and the other two also, demand courage and strength of mind in the believer. And

men are cowardly and weak, ignoble and narrow in mind ; always ready to hope for good, because always inclined to vary their opinions of the good according as necessity sways their life ; most prompt to surrender their arms, as says Petrarch (*Canzone* 45), to their fortune ; most prompt and determined to console themselves in any misfortune, to accept any compensation in exchange for what is denied to them or what they have lost, to accommodate themselves on any condition to any lot more unjust and cruel ; and when they are deprived of everything desirable, to live on false beliefs, as strongly and firmly as if they were the most true or the best founded in the world. For myself, as Southern Europe laughs at the husbands enamoured of unfaithful wives, so I laugh at the human race enamoured of life ; and account very little virile their desire to be deceived and deluded like simpletons, and, in addition to the evils they suffer, be as it were the butt of nature and destiny. I speak always of illusions not of the imagination, but of the intellect. Whether these my sentiments are born of malady I know not : I know that, sick or healthy, I trample down the cowardice of mankind, reject every puerile consolation and illusion, and have the courage to sustain the privation of every hope, to regard intrepidly the desert of life, not to dissimulate to myself any part of human unhappiness, and to accept all the results of a philosophy painful but true. Which philosophy, if good for nothing else, procures for strong men the stern satisfaction of seeing every disguise torn from the masked and mysterious cruelty of human destiny. I said these things to myself, almost as if this painful philosophy had been my own invention, seeing it so denied by all, as things novel and unheard of are denied. But afterwards, on reflection, I remembered that it was just as new as Solomon and Homer, and the most ancient poets and philosophers we know, all of whom abound and superabound in figures, in fables, in sentences, signifying the extremity of human unhappiness ; and one of them says that man is the most miserable of animals ; and another

says that it is best not to be born, and if born to die in the cradle ; others, that one who is dear to the gods dies in youth ; and others an infinity of other things in the same sense. And I also remembered that from those times until yesterday or the day before yesterday all the poets and philosophers and the writers great and small, in one mode or another, had repeated or confirmed the same doctrines. So that I wondered afresh : and thus between the wonder and scorn and laughter passed much time, until studying this matter more profoundly, I discerned that the unhappiness of man was one of the inveterate errors of the intellect ; and that the falsity of this opinion, and the happiness of life, was one of the grand discoveries of the nineteenth century. Then I grew calm ; and I confess that I was wrong in believing what I believed.

F. And you have changed your opinion.

T. Assuredly. Would you have me fight against the truths discovered by the nineteenth century ?

F. And you believe all that is believed by the century ?

T. Certainly. What wonder ?

F. You believe, then, in the indefinite perfectibility of man ?

T. Without doubt.

F. You believe that in fact the human species is growing better every day ?

T. Yes, certainly. It is indeed true that sometimes I think that the ancients, in bodily powers, were each one worth four of us. And the body is the man ; because (leaving all the rest) magnanimity, courage, the passions, the power to act, the power to enjoy, all that makes life noble and vivid, depends on the vigour of the body, and without that has no existence. One who is infirm of body, is not a man, but an infant ; or rather, worse ; for his lot is to look on while others live, and he at the most can babble, but life is not for him. And therefore anciently, infirmity of body was ignominious even in the most civilised periods. But among us, for a very long time now, education has not deigned to think of the body,

a thing too mean and abject ; it thinks of the spirit ; and in its very desire to cultivate the spirit, it ruins the body ; without perceiving that by the ruin of this, it ruins in turn the spirit also. And granting that education might be remedied in this respect, it never could be so without changing radically the modern state of society, finding a proportionate remedy to the other parts of public and private life, which all, by their very nature, conspired of old to make perfect or conserve the body, and now conspire to deprave it. The result is that in comparison with the ancients we are little more than infants, and that the ancients contrasted with us may more than ever be said to have been men. I speak thus of the individuals compared with the individuals ; as well as of the masses (to use this most elegant modern word) compared with the masses. And I say further, that the ancients were incomparably more virile than we, even in moral and metaphysical systems. However, I do not at all allow myself to be moved by such slight objections ; I firmly believe that the human species is always gaining.

F. You also believe, of course, that knowledge, or as it is termed, light, grows continually ?

T. Most certainly. Yet I see that in proportion as the will to learn increases, the will to study decreases. And it is a thing that makes one marvel to count the number of the learned, the really learned, who lived contemporaneously a hundred and fifty years since, and also more recently, and to mark how immeasurably greater it was than the number in the present age. Nor let it be said that the learned are rare because general knowledge is no longer accumulated in some few individuals, but divided amongst many ; and that the abundance of these compensates the rarity of those. Knowledge is not like riches, which are divided and gathered together, and make always the same sum. Where all know a little, little is known ; for learning follows on learning, and is not scattered (*perchè la scienza va dietro alla scienza, e non si sparpaglia*). Superficial instruction may be, not properly divided amongst many, but common to many

not learned. The fest of knowledge does not appertain except to the learned, and a great part of it to only the very learned. And, except in fortuitous cases, only he who is very learned, and provided himself individually with an immense capital of knowledge, is able to solidly increase and lead forward human science. Now, except perhaps in Germany, from which erudition has not yet migrated, does it not appear to you that the growth of such extremely learned men becomes every day less possible? I make these reflections thus for the sake of argument, or to philosophise a little, or perhaps to sophisticate; not that I am not convinced of what you affirm. In fact, even if I saw the world full of ignorant imposture on the one hand, and of ignorant audacity on the other, I should none the less believe, as I do believe, that knowledge and light continually increase.

F. Therefore you believe that this age is superior to all the ages past?

T. Assuredly. Thus have believed of themselves all the ages, even the most barbarous; and thus believe my age, and myself with it. Were you further to demand of me in what it is superior to the other ages, whether in what appertains to the body or in what appertains to the spirit, I would refer to the things already said.

F. In short, to reduce the whole into two words, concerning the nature and the destinies of men and things (for we are now speaking neither of literature nor of politics) do you think as the newspapers think?

T. Exactly. I believe and embrace the profound philosophy of the newspapers, which killing every other literature and every other study, especially the grave and unattractive, are the teachers and light of the present age. Is not this true?

F. Most true. If what you say is said seriously and not in jest, you are become one of us.

T. Yes, certainly, one of you.

F. Oh, then, what will you do with your book? Would you have it go down to posterity with those sentiments so contrary to your present opinions?

T. To posterity? I laugh because you joke; and were it possible that you were not joking, I should laugh more. I will not speak regarding myself; but in regard to the individuals or the individual things of the nineteenth century, understand clearly that there is no fear of posterity, who will know just as much about them as our ancestors knew. *The individuals have disappeared in the masses (Gli individui sono spariti dinanzi alla massa)*, say elegantly the modern thinkers. Which means that it is useless for the individual to take any trouble, since, whatever his merit, not even that miserable prize, glory, remains any longer for him to hope for, either waking or dreaming. Let the masses act; though what they are to do without the individuals, being composed of individuals, I desire and hope to have explained to me by some of those now illuminating the world who understand individuals and masses. But returning to the subject of the book and posterity, and particularly of books, which now for the most part are written in less time than is required to read them, you see well that as they cost what they are worth, so they last in proportion to what they cost. For myself, I believe that the next century will make a most beautiful (cancelling) dash across the immense bibliography of the nineteenth; or will say: I have entire libraries of books which have cost some twenty, some thirty years of labour, and some less, but all very great toil. Let me read these first, for the probability is that from them greater benefit can be drawn; and when of this sort I have no more to read, then I will take in hand the books improvised. My friend, this age is an age of boys, and the very few men that are left should go and hide themselves for shame, like him who walked straight in the country of the cripples. And these excellent boys wish in everything to do what in other times men have done, and to do it just in boyish fashion, at one stroke, and without any preparatory labours. They even will have it that the degree to which civilisation has arrived, and the nature of the present and future times, absolve them and their successors in perpetuity from all need

of long sweating and toiling in order to become fit for anything. A friend of mine, an active man of business, was telling me the other day that even mediocrity is become most rare ; nearly all are inept, nearly all insufficient for those duties or functions to which necessity or fortune or choice has destined them. Herein, as it seems to me, partly consists the difference between this and the other ages. In all the others, as in this, greatness has been most rare ; but in the others mediocrity has held the field, in this, nullity. Whence we have such tumult and confusion, everyone wishing to be everything, that no attention is paid to the few great ones whom I yet believe to exist ; and these, in the immense multitude of the competitors, find it no longer possible to open for themselves a way. And thus, while all the very lowest account themselves illustrious, obscurity and nullity at last become the common fate both of the lowest and the loftiest. But long live statistics ! long live the sciences economic, moral and political, the portable encyclopædias, the manuals, and the so many magnificent creations of our century ! and may our nineteenth century live for ever ! poor it may be in things, but most rich and liberal in words ; which has always been the best of symptoms, as you know. And let it comfort us that for six-and-sixty years more this century will be the only one that speaks and expresses its opinions.

F. You speak, as it appears, somewhat ironically. But, after all, you should at least remember that this is an age of transition.

T. Oh, what do you conclude from that ? All the ages, more or less, have been and will be ages of transition ; for human society never stands still, nor will there ever come an age in which its condition shall be such as can endure. So that your very fine phrase either does not at all excuse the nineteenth century, or the excuse is such as is common to it and all other centuries. It remains to inquire, society continuing on the path it keeps to now, where it must arrive ; that is, whether the transition now in progress is from

good to better or from bad to worse. Perhaps you will tell me that the present age is pre-eminently transitive? that is, a passing rapidly from one state of civilisation to another totally different. In such case, I beg leave to laugh at your rapid passage, and reply that all transitions should be made gently; because if made at one rush, in a very short time after you turn back to make them again step by step. Thus it has always been. The reason is, that nature does not advance by leaps, and that in forcing nature we do not produce results that last. Or, to express it better, such precipitant transitions are apparent, but not real.

F. I pray you, do not speak thus with too many persons, or you will make many enemies.

T. Little matters. Henceforth neither enemies nor friends will do me great harm.

F. Or more probably you will be despised, as little understanding modern philosophy, and caring little for the progress of civilisation and light.

T. I am very sorry, but what is to be done? if they despise me I will seek to console myself.

F. But in fine, have you changed your opinions or not? and what is to be done with this book?

T. Best burn it. If not willing to burn it, keep it as a book of poetic dreams, of melancholy inventions and whims, or as an expression of the unhappiness of the author: because, my dear friend, in confidence, I believe you happy and happy all the others; but as for me, with the permission of yourself and the age, I am most unhappy; and such believe myself; and all the newspapers of the two worlds will not persuade me of the contrary.

F. I do not know the causes of that unhappiness you avow. But whether one is happy or unhappy individually, no one can judge but the person himself; and his judgment cannot err.

T. Most true. And further, I tell you frankly that I do not submit to my unhappiness, nor bow my head to destiny, nor come to terms with it, as do other men; and I dare to desire death, and to desire it.

above every other thing, with such ardour and sincerity that I firmly believe it is not so desired in the world save by a very few. Nor would I speak to you thus were I not quite certain that when the hour is come, the facts will not belie my words, because, although I do not yet see what must end my life, I have a feeling within which almost makes me sure that the hour I mention is not far off. I am so ripe for death, it appears to me too absurd and incredible, thus dead as I am spiritually, thus altogether finished for me the fable of life (*cosi conchiusa in me da ogni parte la favola della vita*), to have to endure yet forty or fifty years, the number with which nature threatens me—at the mere thought of it I shudder. But as occurs with all those evils which vanquish, so to speak, the power of imagination, so this appears to me a dream and an illusion, impossible to be verified. Indeed, if anyone speaks to me of a distant future as a thing appertaining to me, I cannot help smiling to myself: so much confidence have I that the course which remains for me to finish is not long. And this, I can affirm, is the sole thought which sustains me. Books and studies, which I often marvel to have loved so much, designs of great deeds, and hopes of glory and immortality, are things concerning which even the time to laugh at is gone by. At the designs and hopes of this age I laugh not: I wish them with all my soul every possible success; and praise, admire and honour highly and most sincerely their good intentions: but I do not therefore envy posterity, nor those who have still to live long. In other times I have envied the silly and stupid, and those having a great conceit of themselves; and willingly would I have changed with some one of them. Now I no longer envy either the foolish or wise, the great or small, the weak or powerful. I envy the dead, and solely with them would exchange. Every pleasing imagination, every thought of the future, in which I indulge, as happens in my solitude, and with which I pass the time, reposes upon death, and cannot leave it. Nor in this desire am I troubled any longer, as I used to be, by the memory of the

dreams of my first youth, and the thought of having lived in vain. Obtaining death, I will die as tranquil and contented as if I had never hoped or desired anything else in the world. This is the sole boon that can reconcile me to destiny. If on the one hand were offered to me the fortune and fame of Cæsar or Alexander pure from every spot, and on the other death to-day, and I had to choose, I would say, death to-day, and would not want time to determine*.

COMPARISON OF THE LAST WORDS OF BRUTUS THE YOUNGER AND THEOPHRASTUS

I do not think there are to be found in all the memorials of antiquity, words more lamentable and terrible, and yet, speaking humanly†, more true, than

* Written, as we learn from one of its sentences, in 1834 or the beginning of 1835, when the author had still nearly four years of life, or death-in-life, before him.—*Translator.*

† The phrase, *speaking humanly*, seems to have been specially inserted by Leopardi in order to obviate the priestly censure. In a letter to Pietro Brighenti of Bologna, (*Epistolario*; No. 190; 3rd April, 1824), he says: "I, dear friend, have a very great fault, which is that I do not ask leave of the monks when I think or write; and so it comes to pass that when I would print, the monks do not give me leave. . . . You say excellently well that the theologians are a sort of folk as obstinate as the women. It would be easier to pull all the teeth out of their mouth, than an opinion out of their head. Decidedly I think it better to have to do with women, and even with the devil, than with them. For the rest, I do not see how the monarchs are outraged in my new poems: and if in prose virtue is annulled, I say expressly to whoever has studied divinity (*la santacroce*), that I mean to speak of human virtue, and don't enter

those which it is related were uttered by Marcus Brutus, a little before death, in contempt of virtue : which words, reported by Dion Cassius, are these : *O miserable virtue, thou wert a bare word, and I followed thee as if thou hadst been a reality ; but thou wert subject to fortune.* And although Plutarch in his life of Brutus does not distinctly vouch this sentence, so that Pier Vettori suspects that Dion in this particular wrote rather as poet than as historian, the contrary is made clear by the testimony of Florus, who affirms that Brutus, about to die, broke forth exclaiming *that virtue was not a reality but a word.* The very many who are scandalised at Brutus, and blame him for this sentence, show one of two things : either that they have never been intimate with virtue, or that they have no experience of misfortunes ; of which only the former case can appear credible. And at any rate, it is certain that they understand little and feel less the most unhappy nature of human affairs, or blindly marvel that the doctrines of Christianity were not professed before it had birth. Those others who wrest these words to prove that Brutus was never the holy (*santo*) and magnanimous man he was accounted while living, and conclude that in dying he unmasked himself, reason perversely : and if they believe that these words came from his heart, and that Brutus in thus speaking really repudiated virtue, let them see to it how that can be abandoned which has never been held, and how one can separate from that from which he has always kept aloof. If they do not account these words sincere, but think they were said with art and through ostentation ; firstly, what mode is this to argue from the words to the deeds, and at the same time to reject the words as vain and fallacious ? to conclude that the deeds are hypocritical because judging into discussion of the virtues theological. I say, that at the commencement of the prose which has occasioned the reprimand, it is written that virtue is etc., etc., *humanly speaking* ; and at the end of the same prose religion is so touched upon that no one, except a revising monk, can find therein anything to blame."—*Translator.*

that the words do not sound in unison with them; and deny the words any authority deeming them feigned? Moreover, they have to persuade us that a man overcome by excessive and irreparable calamity; disheartened and indignant with life and fortune; beyond all desires, and all the illusions of hope; resolved to anticipate mortal destiny and to punish himself for his own unhappiness; in the very hour that he is on the point of parting eternally from men, fatigues himself to pursue the phantasm of glory, and goes on studying and arranging words and thoughts to deceive those standing around, and make himself prized by those from whom he is about to flee, and on that earth which appears to him most hateful and contemptible. But enough of this.

While the above written words of Brutus are, it may be said, familiar to all; those I will subjoin of Theophrastus moribund, have not, I believe, ever strayed out of the writings of the learned (wherein also I do not know what judgment is passed on them), notwithstanding that they are most worthy of consideration, and that they have much correspondence with the speech of Brutus, both by the occasion on which they were pronounced, and by their meaning. Diogenes Laertius reports them, copying, in my opinion, some writer more antique and grave, as he is wont to do. He says, then, that Theophrastus, about to die, and asked by his disciples whether he would leave them no memorial or commandment, replied: "None; except that man contemns and casts away many pleasures for the sake of glory. But he has thus scarcely commenced to live, when death overtakes him. Therefore nothing is more baneful than the love of glory. Live happy, and leave studies, for they require great toil; or cultivate them, if you must, for the sake of the fame they bring. The vanity of life exceeds its utility. For myself there is no longer time to deliberate: you others consider what may be the most expedient." And so saying expired.

Other things said by Theophrastus in his last hours are found recorded by Cicero and St. Jerome, and are

more widely known; but they do not concern our subject. By these we have read it is proved that Theophrastus, aged more than a hundred years, having spent all his life in studying and writing, and striving indefatigably for fame; brought, as says Suidas, to his end by his very assiduity in writing; encompassed by about two thousand disciples, which is as much as to say followers and preachers of his doctrines; revered and extolled for his wisdom by all Greece; died, so to say, penitent for glory, as Brutus afterwards for virtue. Which two words, glory and virtue, are not indeed now, but were among the ancients almost synonymous. And therefore Theophrastus did not go on to declare that glory itself is most frequently the result of fortune rather than of worth; which could not be said anciently so well as now: but if Theophrastus could have added this, his idea would have wanted nothing for perfect similarity to that of Brutus.

Such renuncements of, or, we will say, apostasies from those magnanimous errors which adorn or more truly compose our life, that is all it has of life rather than of death, become quite common, and occur daily, after the human intellect with the progress of the ages has discovered, I do not say the nakedness, but even to the skeletons of things; and after wisdom, thought by the ancients the chief consolation and remedy for our unhappiness, is reduced to denounce it, and as it were become surety for it to those very persons who, not recognising it, would either not have felt it, or certainly would have medicined it with hope. But among the ancients, accustomed as they were to believe, in accordance with the teaching of nature, that things were things, and not shadows, and that human life was destined for something else than misery, such apostasies as these, occasioned not by passions or vices, but by the sense and discernment of the truth, are very seldom found to occur; and therefore, when found, it is right that the philosopher consider them attentively.

And we must be the more surprised by the words of

Theophrastus, inasmuch as the circumstances of his death could not be called unhappy, and it does not appear that Theophrastus could complain of them, having acquired and enjoyed for a very long period until then his principal object, which had been glory. But the idea of Brutus was an inspiration of calamity, which sometimes has the power to reveal to our mind as it were another world, and to vividly persuade us of things such that a long time must elapse ere reason by itself can find them out, and teach them to the generality of men, or even of philosophers only. And in this the effect of calamity is like the frenzy (*furore*) of the lyric poets, who at a glance (because they have ascended as it were to an immense altitude) discover such vast regions as the philosophers are not able to discover in the course of many ages. In nearly all ancient books (whether the writers be philosophers or poets or historians or of any other class), we meet with many most glorious sayings, which although they are now more popularly current, yet cannot be said to have been strange to the men of those times. But these for the most part derive from the misery special and accidental to him who wrote them, or to him who is recounted or feigned to utter them. And those ideas, or speaking generally, that sadness and tedium which accompany the appearance of felicity no less than they accompany misery itself, are very rarely found expressed in the monuments of the ancients. For they, when harassed by misfortune, lamented as if by these only they were deprived of felicity; which they believed it was quite possible to obtain; or rather that it was the common heritage of man, save when fortune deprived him of it.

Wishing to trace what could have induced in the mind of Theophrastus the sentiment of the vanity of glory and of life, a sentiment which, considering his epoch and nation, was extraordinary; we shall find, firstly, that the science of that philosopher did not restrain itself in the limits of this or the other department of study, but extended to little less than all that could be known (so much as could be known in that

age), as we gather from the list of the writings of Theophrastus, whereof the greater part has perished. And this universal science was not subordinated by him, as by Plato, to the imagination, but solely to reason and experience, according to the method of Aristotle; and was directed, not to the study and research of the beautiful, but of its greatest contrary, which is essentially the true. Considering this speciality, it is not wonderful that Theophrastus should arrive at the knowledge of the summit of wisdom, that is, the vanity of life and of wisdom itself; seeing that the numerous discoveries made by the philosophers of these later times concerning the nature of men and things, come principally from the comparison and collation which have been made of the various sciences and almost all the doctrines among themselves, and from having connected the one with the other, and by these means having considered the unexpected relations that mutually obtain between the various parts of nature, however remote from each other.

Moreover, from the book of *Characters* we discern that Theophrastus had such deep insight into the qualities and habits of men, that very few antique authors can stand beside him in this respect, save perhaps the poets. But this faculty is a sure sign of a mind capable of many and various and powerful affections. Because the moral qualities as also the dispositions of men, when one would represent them to the life, cannot so much be drawn from physical observation of the actions and manners of others, as from one's own mind, even when they are totally alien from the temperament of the writer. According to what was said by Massillon when asked how he managed to describe so naturally the manners and sentiments of people, living habitually as he did much more in solitude than in society. He answered—I consider myself. Thus do the dramatists and the other poets. Now a mind capable of many dispositions, that is very delicate and quick, cannot but feel the nakedness and irreparable unhappiness of life, and be disposed to sadness, when many studies have accustomed it to

meditate, and particularly if these studies concern the very essence of things, in the mode appertaining to the speculative sciences.

• Certain it is that Theophrastus, loving studies and glory above all things, and being master, or we will say head of a school, and a school crowded with scholars, recognised and declared formally the inutility of human toils, and thus of his own teachings as well as those of others; the little proportion that obtains between virtue and happiness of life; and how much fortune outweighs worth in what regards this same happiness, both of others and of the wise. And perhaps in the knowledge of these things he surpassed all the Grecian philosophers, especially those that came before Epicurus, although he was very different in his habits and opinions from the subsequent Epicureans. All this can be inferred, not only from what has been said before, but from what we find of his teachings in several passages of the ancient writers. And as if he had been bound to demonstrate by the accidents befalling himself the truth of his doctrines; firstly, he is not held by modern philosophers in adequate esteem, all his moral works, except only the *Characters*, having been, so far as is known, lost many ages since; as likewise are lost the works appertaining to politics or laws; and nearly all the metaphysical. Besides which, the ancient philosophers, so far from celebrating him for having seen further than themselves, for this very cause vituperated and maltreated him; and particularly those, as much less subtle as they were more arrogant, who delighted to affirm and maintain that the wise man is happy in himself; concluding that virtue or wisdom suffices for beatitude; when they felt only too surely in themselves that it does not suffice, if indeed they actually possessed either the one or the other of these conditions. Of which phantasy it does not appear that philosophers are yet cured, or rather it appears that they have grown very much worse, determining that we must be brought to happiness by the present philosophy, which in brief does not and cannot declare otherwise than that all the beautiful,

the delightful, and the great is falsity and nullity. But not to leave Theophrastus : most of the ancients were incapable of that dolorous and profound sentiment which animated him. Theophrastus is maltreated in the books and schools of all the philosophers for having praised that word of Callisthenes : “ *Not wisdom, but fortune is the ruler of life.* ” They assert that no philosopher ever said anything more feeble than this. Such are the words of Cicero, who in another place writes that Theophrastus in his book on the blissful life, gave much to fortune—that is, he judged it of immense importance in relation to happiness. And a little further on adds : At all events, we may avail ourselves of Theophrastus in many points, save that we attribute to virtue more consistency and vigour than he allowed it. Cicero himself may see what can be allowed it.

Perhaps from these considerations some will conclude that Theophrastus must have professed little liking for natural errors, and even that for his part he must have sought by his precepts and example to banish them from the domestic and public practice of life, and to restrain the effects and authority of imagination, enlarging the bounds of reason. But it should be known that Theophrastus, both in teaching and action, was quite the contrary. As to his example, we read in Plutarch, in the book against Colotes, that our philosopher twice delivered his native place from tyranny. As to his teachings, Cicero says that Theophrastus, in a book he wrote upon riches, largely extolled the magnificence and decoration of popular shows and festivals, and placed a great part of the utility deriving from riches in the power to afford the expense of such things ; which opinion is blamed by Cicero, and cited as absurd. I do not wish to contend with Cicero on this subject, though I know and discern that he could deceive himself, and probe things with that philosophy of his which penetrates little beneath the surface. But I account him a man so rich in every virtue, private and civil, that I have not the heart to accuse him that he knew not the greatest

incitements to virtue, and the strongest defences of virtue there are in the world, I would say such things as are suited to stimulate and stir up men's minds, and exercise the faculty of imagination. I will only assert that whoever, either among the ancients or the moderns, best knew and felt most strongly and deeply in his heart the nullity of all things and the efficacy of the truth, not only did not seek that others should reduce themselves to his condition, but made every effort to hide and dissimulate it from himself, and favoured above every other those opinions and effects which are useful to show it*, as he who by his own experience had been taught what misery results from the perfection and supremacy of wisdom. In support of which assertion some very illustrious examples, particularly of modern times, might be alleged. And in truth, if our philosophers fully understood what they labour to promulgate, or (supposing they understand) if they felt it, that is, if they understood it by experience and not by mere speculation; instead of exulting in their knowledge, they would regard it with hate and terror; would strive to forget what they know, and, as it were, not to see what they see; would take refuge to the best of their power, in those most fortunate illusions which, not this or the other accident, but universal nature with her own hand has planted in all minds; and finally they would not believe that it is of great importance to persuade others that nothing is of importance however great it may appear. And if they do this through appetite for glory, they admit that in this part of the universe we cannot live save inasmuch as we believe in and apply ourselves to nullities.

Another circumstance by which the case of Theophrastus differs remarkably from that of Brutus, is the nature of the times. For the epoch of Theophrastus was, if not propitious, at any rate not repag-

* I am inclined to think that there is an error in the text here; but the obscurity of this clause does not darken the remainder of the sentence.—*Translator.*

nant to those dreams and phantasms which governed the thoughts and acts of the ancients. Whereas we may affirm that the times of Brutus were the last age of the imagination ; the knowledge and experience of the truth finally prevailing, and even spreading among the common people sufficiently to produce the old age of the world. For if this had not been, neither would Brutus have had cause to escape from life as he did, nor would the Roman republic have been dead with him. But not only this, for indeed all antiquity, I mean the antique nature and habitudes of all civilised peoples, were near dissolution along with the opinions which had generated and nourished them. And this life having already lost all value, the wise searched what they might have to console them, not so much against fortune as against life itself, not reputing it credible that man was born solely and simply for misery. Thus they had recourse to the belief in and expectation of another life, in which rested that reason of virtue and magnanimous actions, which until then had been found, but was found no longer, and never more could be found, in the things of this earth. From these thoughts sprang those most noble sentiments which Cicero has expounded in several places, and particularly in the Oration for Archias.

APOCRYPHAL FRAGMENT OF STRATO OF LAMPSACUS

THIS fragment, which for pastime I have translated from the Greek into the vulgar tongue, is taken from a manuscript which some years since was, and perhaps still is, in the library of the monks of Mount Athos. I entitle it *Apocryphal Fragment*, because, as everyone will see, the things which are found in the chapter on *The End of the World* could only have been written within modern times, whereas Strato of Lampsacus, a

peripatetic philosopher, surnamed the Physicist, lived three hundred years before the Christian era. It is indeed true that the chapter on *The Origin of the World* agrees very closely with the opinions of that philosopher, as they have been handed down to us by various ancient authors. And therefore it may be that the first chapter, and perhaps also the beginning of the other, are really by Strato, the rest having been added by some learned Greek not earlier than the last century. Let the learned reader judge for himself.

OF THE ORIGIN OF THE WORLD

As all material things perish and have an end, so also they have a beginning. But matter itself had no beginning—that is to say, it has existed by its own inherent force from all eternity. For if from seeing that material things grow and diminish and at last dissolve, we conclude that they do not exist in themselves from all eternity, but that they had a commencement and an origin, ought we not also to conclude that that which never grows, diminishes, or perishes, never began and never proceeded from any cause? Assuredly if either of these propositions is false, the other cannot be true. But since we are certain that the former is true, we must allow that the latter is true also. Now, we see that matter never increases by even the smallest quantity, and that not even the smallest particle of it is ever lost; so that it is not possible that it can ever perish. Nevertheless, the various modes of existence of matter which are seen in what we call material creatures are frail and transient; but no sign of decay or mortality is seen in matter itself, and therefore no sign that it had a beginning, or that any force beyond itself was necessary to create it. The world, that is, the existence of matter in a particular mode, had a beginning and will sometime perish. We may now speak of the origin of the world.

Universal matter, as in particular plants and animated creatures, has in itself one or more forces which agitate and move it in various ways. These forces we are able to recognise and to name from

their effects ; but we cannot know them in themselves, or discover their inmost nature. Nor can we even know whether those effects which we refer to one and the same cause really proceed from one or from several forces ; or if, on the contrary, those forces which we distinguish by various names are really distinct forces, or only different manifestations of one only force. So every day among men divers names are given to the same passion or the same force ; for example, ambition, love of pleasure, and the like, from each of which flow effects, sometimes merely diverse, sometimes of a quite opposite character. But these passions are, in fact, one passion only ; namely, the love of self, which operates differently in different circumstances. These forces, then, or rather this force of matter, moving it, as we have said, and agitating it continually, forms from the said matter innumerable creatures—that is to say, modifies it in the most various ways. Which creatures, taken all together, and considered as they are classed in genera and species, and conjoined among themselves by the dispositions and relations arising from their nature, we call the world. But as the said force never ceases to act upon and modify matter, those creatures which are continually formed by it are no less continually destroyed, in order that from their matter new beings may be created. Yet while, despite the destruction of individuals, the genera and species are wholly or for the most part maintained, and while the order and natural relations of things do not sensibly change, the world is said still to endure. But an infinity of worlds in the infinite space of eternity, after having endured for a shorter or longer time, has finally come to an end ; and the continual revolutions of matter effected by the said force have caused the genera and species whereof those worlds were composed to perish, and the dispositions and relations that governed it to fail. Nevertheless, matter has not therefore diminished by a single particle ; only some particular modes of its existence have disappeared, and these are succeeded immediately by other modes, and so on for ever.

OF THE END OF THE WORLD

How long a time the present world, of which men make part—that is to say, one of the species of which it is composed—has lasted until now cannot easily be determined; nor is it more easy to determine what length of time it will yet endure. The laws by which it is governed appear immutable, and men believe them to be so, because they only change little by little, and in the course of vast periods of time; so that their mutations scarcely fall within the knowledge, much less under the senses of mankind. Yet these vast periods, however great they may be, are nevertheless only minute fractions of time as compared with the eternal duration of matter. We see in the world a continual perishing of individuals, and a continual transformation of things from one condition to another; but as destruction is ever balanced by production, and the species are always preserved, it is thought that this world neither has nor is likely to have in itself any cause which may or must destroy it; moreover, it shows no apparent signs of decay. Nevertheless, the contrary may be clearly shown by several indications, among which the following may be mentioned.

We know that the earth, because of its perpetual revolution around its own axis, which makes the parts about the Equator fly from the centre, and which attracts to the centre those about the poles, has changed, and is continually changing its figure, becoming always more dense about the Equator and more depressed at the poles. From this, then, it will come to pass that at the end of a certain time, of which the length, though measurable in itself, cannot be known by man, the earth will so flatten itself on both sides of the Equator that, losing altogether the form of a globe, it will assume the shape of a thin round table. This wheel, revolving continually around its own centre, will become ever more and more attenuated and dilated; and in course of time, all its parts flying from the centre, an opening will be

pierced through the middle. This opening growing larger day by day, the earth will take the form of a ring, and ultimately break in pieces. These fragments, being thrown out of the present orbit of the earth, and losing their circular motion, will precipitate themselves into the sun, or possibly into some planet.

In confirmation of this reasoning, an example may peradventure be adduced. I allude to the ring of Saturn, as to the nature of which physicists are not agreed among themselves. And, although a new and unheard of conjecture, it may not be an improbable one to presume that the said ring was originally one of the minor planets destined to follow in the train of Saturn, and that it was flattened and afterwards opened in the middle by causes similar to those which we have mentioned as being now in operation on our own planet; though it seems likely that the alteration has taken place much more quickly than in our own case, owing to its substance being less dense and hard than that of the earth. From these causes it fell from its orbit to the planet Saturn, which retains it on its centre by its attractive power, as we now see it. And we may well believe that this ring, in continuing still to revolve on its centre, as it does, which is the same as that of Saturn, grows ever more and more thin and dilated, and that the interval between it and the greater planet is always increasing; although this proceeds much too slowly to be known or observed by men, even if it were not so distant as it is. So much may be said, seriously or in jest, about the ring of Saturn.

Now that change which we know to have taken place, and to be continually taking place, in the figure of the earth, no doubt occurs also in the other planets, and from the same causes, although this change is more manifest to us in Jupiter than in the others. This may be affirmed not only of those which, like the earth, revolve around the sun, but also of those planets which we have every reason to believe are around each star. Wherefore, as we have said of the earth, all the planets will some time break up, and

precipitate themselves, those of our own system upon the sun, and the others upon their stars. In which catastrophe it is manifest that not only some or many individuals will be destroyed, but absolutely all the genera and species which now exist on the earth and the other planets. And this, perchance, or something similar, was in the minds of those philosophers, both Greeks and barbarians, who affirmed that the earth will finally be destroyed by fire. But as we see that the sun revolves on its own axis, and therefore the same must be true of the stars, it follows that they also must, no less than the planets, in course of time fall into dissolution, and their fires be dispersed in space. So that eventually the circular motion of the mundane spheres, which is the principal element of the present order of nature, and, as it were, the origin and source of the conservation of the universe, will be likewise the cause of the destruction of it, and of its order.

Though the planets, the earth, the sun, and the stars will be destroyed, the substance of which they are composed will still endure, and from this will be formed new creatures, divided into new genera and species; and there will be born from its eternal forces a new order of things and a new world. But as to the qualities and conditions of this new universe, and also of the multitude that have been and will be, it is impossible to form any conception.

PREFACE TO THE TRANSLATION OF THE MORAL DISCOURSES OF ISOCRATES

As much, or almost as much, pleasure is derived from reading translations of good modern books, if only the translation is clear and faithful, as can be derived from reading the books in their original tongues. But the translations which we have, or

which daily appear, of fine and classical ancient writings, not only do not give the same pleasure as the original texts, but give no sort of pleasure at all. They are, in fact, infinitely tedious, except in the case of histories and works of a kindred character. The cause of this difference is that in modern works the style counts for very little, whereas in the ancient writers it counts for very much, if not for everything. Isocrates remarked "that in treatises upon principles and duties, novelties are not to be sought for, but he is to be reputed the best writer who gathers together the ideas floating in the minds of men, and expresses them in the most graceful manner." Now not only in that species of composition alluded to in this passage, but in many others, it may equally be said that the ancient writers proposed to themselves not to say new things, nor to expound original discoveries or ideas; but to express finely and elegantly, and in a manner above the vulgar reach, those things which were known and thought by the men of the time, and even by the common people. Therefore clearness and fidelity do not suffice in translations of the ancient classics, which cannot be said to be truly translated unless they are rendered with supreme art and care as regards the style—an art and care which should be everywhere apparent. And since among the moderns generally the subtle and delicate art of style is little practised, very few caring to study its refinements, it is not wonderful that for the most part the translations which we have in all or nearly all modern languages of the ancient classics are so intolerably bad that it is almost impossible to read them.

As the French in their present language have only one style of writing, and that style is altogether different from that of the ancients, they have not, and cannot have, true translations of the classic writers. If they wish to have such they should recur to the old French vernacular, now abandoned and almost lost, but intrinsically beautiful and powerful: witness the experiment of Paul Louis Courier, who recently translated into this old French certain parts of Herodotus.

The Germans have in their language (certainly infinitely various, copious, most fecund and free, omnipotent, like the Greek) a great number of versions of ancient writings, which they hold in high esteem, and which are said to be very faithful to the original texts. But whether they have that kind of excellence which is demanded I know not. I do know that many of them represent most faithfully the order, the number of words, the march and sound of the periods; in short, all the mechanical part of the diction of their authors, so that, so to say, all the material substance of their originals is transplanted in their versions; but this does not mean that the style in which they have been rendered is good or perfect, if considered as German works. Rather I would say, 'Either the German language has no distinctive character, in which case it cannot have any beauty of style; or, if it has a character of its own, then such translations as conform in everything to the custom, manner, and mould of other tongues cannot be in a good German style.' All other nations (I speak in this discourse specially of prose writings) are rather destitute of good and true renderings of ancient writings than possessed of few of them; not because their languages, like the French, are incapable of representing the beauties of the originals, but because of the little study and labour which their men of talent have devoted to the task of translation, or, it may be, because of their incompetence to perform it. Certainly no modern language, except the German, could be better adapted than our own to render perfectly, or at least excellently, the masterpieces of all foreign languages, but more especially those of the Greek and Latin writers. Yet in this particular we find ourselves poorer than all other nations. And speaking only of Greek and Latin works, it seems that in that age in which the study of those two languages, and of our own, flourished more than at any other period—I mean the sixteenth century—our best talents feared, and therefore did not attempt, to translate the great works of the ancient authors. These were indeed

almost all rendered into our own tongue, but most of them inadequately or unworthily. It is true that we read with delight the works of Seneca and Boethius in Varchi's translations, and those of Aristotle, Nazianzen, and St. Cyprian in Caro's renderings; all of which are in an admirable style, and so free and fluent that they seem to be original writings rather than translations. But this excellence no Italian translator in prose, since the sixteenth century, has been able to attain, except perhaps Gasparo Gozzi. But neither St. Cyprian, nor Gregory Nazianzen, nor Aristotle in his *Rhetoric*, nor Boethius, nor Seneca were masters of a beautiful style; and in this respect the aforesaid translators were undoubtedly superior to their originals. Wherefore it is to be regretted that men of such talent as these, instead of amusing us, as it were, with works of inferior quality, did not devote their energies to the translation of the writings of the supreme authors of the classical era. I will not speak of the *Livy* of Nardi or the *Tacitus* of Davanzati, both men of more than ordinary powers; but the former of whom, for some reason, failed to produce a satisfactory version of his author, while the latter unfortunately erred in his choice of manner. And much less will I pause to speak of our translators of the fourteenth century, who, much more daring than the ablest and most learned men of the sixteenth century, did not fear to attempt to render Sallust, Livy, Cicero, and others of the most eminent classical writers, in spite of their ignorance of the Greek and Latin languages, and of their own. This was the more inexcusable in them, inasmuch as the language of their time furnished them with a most beautiful instrument, which, however, proved in their hands not only stupid and wearisome, but even absurd, and resembling rather a foreign language than their own. As they did not understand themselves, they were of course unintelligible to others: and thus they produced works which are as much prized for their strange words and locutions as they are despised for their style and for their shortcomings as translations.

Returning to the sixteenth century, it may be observed that the style of Marcello Adriani in the *Morals of Plutarch* is not above mediocrity, although, considering that Plutarch's own style in those treatises is also rather beneath than above mediocrity, it might be presumed that Adriani's is a sufficient translation, were it not that the latter had such an imperfect knowledge of Greek; and the texts which he used were so incorrect, that his rendering is in a great degree a false and misleading one. The like may be said of Adriani's translation of the work of Demetrius on *Eloquence*. As to the *Longus* of Caro—a juvenile work, unfinished and uncorrected—its style appears to me to be little worthy of praise and wanting in beauty, and this for the very reason that commends it to others, namely, its abundance of ornament, which to me seems excessive; nor does the rhetoric of *Longus*, scarcely conformable to the genius of the Greek language, give him a title to be considered as a classical writer of the first class.

What should I say of our more modern writers if I were writing at length? What should I say, among others, of *The Loves of Abrocome and Anzia* of Salvini, which is praised I know not wherefore? Therein I find, according to the usual practice of that writer, a diction neither Italian nor Greek, but a monstrous and barbarous mixture of both, and a construction that would be much more suitable to an interlinear version. What should I say of the *Longinus* of Gori, which, besides the triviality of the style and language, is, I will not say sprinkled, but thickly studded with errors in understanding and interpreting the Greek text? Yet, to our shame be it said, this translation is universally received in Italy as a work not only good and correct, but excellent and classical.

I think that it would be very beneficial if Italian scholars, who have, as I have said, a language very fit for the purpose of translation, would apply themselves to this much more than they do now, or than they have hitherto done, and endeavour, like the Germans, to produce fine renderings, and such as might them-

selves merit to be termed classical. And this would be a study without danger, and so much the more opportune in Italy, as the study and practice of the Greek and Latin languages are here much less common than in Germany and other countries. But since our countrymen of to-day have not, to speak the truth, any sense of the virtue and vices of diction and style, and for the most part judge of these things at random, confounding the mediocre with the best, the good with the bad, and sometimes the best with the worst: what glory, I say, would accrue to the translators, or what benefit to readers, or, to speak summarily, what fruit would come from such works and from the art and infinite labour required to attain the elegance of language and the perfection they ought to have? To anyone who questioned me thus I would endeavour to make some answer, but what I should say I do not at present know.

EXTRACT FROM A REVIEW OF LONG'S TRANSLATION OF THE *DISCOURSES* *OF EPICTETUS*

AMONG the mature works of Leopardi is a translation into Italian of the "Encheiridion," with the following short but weighty preface:—

'Not a few just judgments, various keen reflections, many extremely useful precepts and admonitions, as well as a grateful simplicity and familiarity of style, make this little book very precious and dear. I, indeed, am of opinion that the practical philosophy here taught is, if not alone among others, at least more than others, profitable in the regulation (*uso*) of human life, better adapted to man, and specially to such persons as by nature or habit are not heroic, nor very strong, but tempered and endowed with mediocre strength, or are even weak; and therefore to modern

men yet more than to the ancient. I know well that this opinion of mine is contrary to the general, it being commonly reputed that the practice of the Stoic philosophy is not suitable, nor even possible, save to those only who are beyond measure virile and robust. *Whereas essentially it appears to me that the origin and reason of this philosophy, and particularly of that of Epictetus, does not at all consist, as is asserted, in the consideration of the force, but certainly of the weakness of man; and thus that the use and usefulness of the said philosophy appertain more precisely to the latter than to the former human quality. For that tranquillity of mind desired by Epictetus above every thing else, that state free from passion, that giving no thought to external things, is nothing but what we term coldness of heart (*animo*), carelessness, or, if you will, indifference. Now the usefulness of this temper, and of its maintenance in the affairs of life, springs solely from this, that man cannot in his life by any means either attain happiness or avoid continual unhappiness. For if it were possible for him to attain these ends, it would certainly not be useful, nor even rational, to abstain from seeking them. Now, not being able to reach them, it is the nature (*proprio*) of great and strong spirits to persist nevertheless in eagerly desiring and seeking them, to resist Necessity, at least within themselves, to wage fierce and mortal war against Destiny, like the Seven at Thebes of Æschylus, and the other magnanimous men of antiquity. It is characteristic of spirits weak by nature, or weakened by habitual sufferance and by knowledge of the natural and irreparable imbecility of mankind, to yield and conform themselves to fortune and fate, to reduce themselves to desire but little, and even this little timidly; in fact, so to speak, to lose almost altogether the habit and faculty both of hoping and desiring. And whereas that state of enmity and war against a power incomparably greater than the human and never vincibile, on the one hand can have no fruit, and on the other is full of perturbation, toil, anguish, and the most grievous and con-

tinual misery; on the contrary, this other state of peace, and as it were subjection of mind and tranquil servitude, while it has nothing of noble, is nevertheless conformable to reason, suitable to our mortal nature, and free from the greater part of the troubles, sorrows, and sufferings by which our life is usually afflicted. So that truly to obtain that better condition of life and that sole happiness which can be found in the world, men finally have no other way than this, to renounce, so to speak, happiness, and abstain as much as possible from shunning its opposite.* Now the carelessness as to outward things, enjoined by Epictetus and the other Stoics, amounts precisely to this; that is, not to be anxious for happiness nor to shun unhappiness. This teaching, which is equivalent to saying that we ought to love ourselves with the utmost possible lack of ardour and tenderness, is in truth the crown and end, both of the philosophy of Epictetus, and also of all human wisdom, in so far as it relates to the well-being of the spirit of each person in particular. And I, who after many struggles of the mind and many sufferings, reduced, as it were in spite of myself, to practise habitually the said teaching, have gained from this practice and continue to gain incredible profit (*utilità*), wish and pray warmly for all those who shall read these pages, the faculty of putting it similarly into execution.'

And in the second chapter of the Memorable Sayings (Detti Memorabili) of Filippo Ottonieri, under which pseudonym he manifestly refers to himself, we read:†

So Pascal, whose life and genius were so nearly akin to Leopardi's, and who often refers to the Stoics

* Compare George Eliot on poor young Maggie's study of Thomas à Kempis: 'She had not perceived—how could she until she had lived longer?—the inmost truth of the old monk's outpourings, that renunciation means sorrow, though a sorrow borne willingly.'—*The Mill on the Floss*: book iv. chap. iii.—*Translator*.

† The passage which Thomson quotes here will be found on p. 217. It begins: 'He often laughed at those philosophers'—and ends: 'power of fortune.'—*Editor*.

and specially to Epictetus, remarks ("Pensées": Article iii. 12)—I translate roughly: 'The mind of this sovereign judge of the world [man] is not so independent but that it is liable to be disturbed by any noise whatever. It needs not the sound of a cannon to hinder his thoughts; it needs but the creaking of a vane or a pulley. Do not wonder that he cannot reason well at present: a fly is buzzing at his ears: it is enough to render him incapable of good counsel. If you would enable him to find the truth, chase away this insect that holds his reason in check, and troubles this mighty intelligence which governs cities and kingdoms. A fine god indeed. *O ridicolosissimo eroe!*'

And again (iii. 14): 'We have another cause of error in diseases. They impair our judgment and sense. And, if serious maladies alter these perceptibly, I doubt not that slight ones have a proportionate influence.' And (iii. 16): 'Justice and truth are points so subtle (fine) that our pencils are too blunt to mark them exactly. If they reach their aim, they break their point, and press all around, more on the false than on the true.'

I could quote many other passages, but these may suffice here. My object is to show that two men, who are not only among the most perfect writers, but also among the most subtle and sincere thinkers of modern times, the Pascal of France and the Pascal of Italy, the former an ascetic Christian, the latter an Atheistic Pessimist (for as truly as extremes meet do brothers most diverge), are at one in their judgment upon the self-sufficiency of the Stoic and his independence of Fortune. As to the other doctrine, that a man is not really harmed by anything which does not make him morally worse, that the harm is in opinion, not in fact, it has been more than once ridiculed by Shakespeare (who was probably peculiarly sensitive to pain as to pleasure, and had no iron will for endurance), as in the mocking instance of a philosopher with the toothache. Yet we have seen that Epictetus triumphed over ills and sufferings immeasurably more poignant

than the toothache. And other great Stoics were not less victorious over what common men, including, it may be observed, the vast mass of both Christians and Freethinkers, would now regard as overwhelming and crushing calamities.

While the principles of Epictetus and Antoninus are essentially the same, the tone of the one so far differs from that of the other that the two seem, as it were, to have changed characters, or at least situations: the Slave is insistent and imperious, the Emperor gentle and resigned. The former, addressing pupils, presses them with the most searching questions, and unrelentingly submits them to the most vigorous and rigorous practical discipline; the latter, jotting down private notes, often gives way to musing, and shows more of ideality, his thoughts floating in reverie over vast æons, till the present and the whole lifetime become but as vanishing points. But the two are equally noble, brave, sincere, and magnanimous; each an honour to the human race. High as are the names in Bohn's Classical Series, were my choice thereof limited to two volumes, I think I would take these rugged notes of the Emperor and of the oral teaching of the ex-Slave. With these for moral philosophy, and Plutarch for biography, all who want sacred writings without dreams and fictions of the supernatural have a sufficient Bible, an adequate manual of heroic and generous culture. In them may be read what Shelley had in his thought when he wrote:

‘So taught the kings of old philosophy,
Who reigned before religion made men blind.’

THOUGHTS (PENSIERI)

I HAVE long refused to credit the things which I am now about to state, because, besides the fact that I found nothing in my own nature resembling them, and one always tends to judge others by himself, my inclination has always been to love men rather than to hate them. At last experience has, forcibly as it were, convinced me; and I am certain that those readers who have had much and various commerce with mankind will confess that my statements are true; all others will hold them for exaggerated, until experience, if ever they gain real experience of life, convinces them also of their truth.

I say that the world is a league of rogues against the true men, of the vile against the generous. When two or three rogues find themselves together for the first time, they easily, and as if by signs intelligible only to themselves, know each other for what they are, and at once fraternise; or if their interests will not allow this, at least respect and feel at home with each other. If a rogue has dealings or makes bargains with other rogues, it very often happens that he behaves loyally, and does not deceive them; if with men of honour it is impossible but he will break faith with them, and whenever it is likely to turn to his advantage will seek to ruin them, even if they are persons of courage and capable of revenging themselves; because he hopes, as almost always is the result, to overcome with his frauds their bravery. I have often seen timid men, who, finding themselves placed between a rogue more timid than themselves and a true man full of courage, will through fear take the part of the rogue. Indeed, this occurs almost always when ordinary people find themselves

similarly situated, because the lives of honest and courageous men are known and simple, while those of the vicious are secret and infinitely varied. Now, as everyone is aware, things unknown cause more fear than the known; and one easily guards himself against the vengeance of the generous, from which very vileness and fear save you; but no vileness and no fear can be sufficient to save you from the secret persecutions, from the intrigues, nor even from the open blows with which vile enemies attack you. Generally in daily life true courage is feared very little; because, despising imposture, it makes no attempt to put on a terrible aspect, and often it is not believed in; while the rogues are feared as courageous, because men are imposed upon by their shameless assurance.

Rogues are rarely poor. If an honest man falls into poverty no one succours him, and many rejoice at his ill-fortune; but if a rogue becomes poor all the city rouses itself to aid him. The reason is easily understood: it is that we are naturally touched by the misfortunes of one who is our companion and fellow, because the ills which afflict him appear to be also threats against ourselves; and willingly, if able, we assist him to overcome his troubles, because if we did not we could hardly expect assistance ourselves were we in a like case. Now the rogues, who in the world are the greater number and abound more in ability, hold all other rogues, whether known to them or not, for companions and comrades, and in case of need feel themselves bound to succour each other by that freemasonry which, as I have said, exists among them. And it would indeed seem a scandal to them that a man known for a rogue should be seen in distress; because the world, paying lip-homage to virtue, usually regards a man's misfortunes as a punishment for his sins; and thus the misery of one of them may redound to the opprobrium and harm of them all. Therefore, to avoid this scandal, they exert themselves so effectively that few examples are seen of rogues, except it may be some wholly obscure ones, who having fallen into misfortune do not quickly mend their estate.

On the contrary, the good and the magnanimous, as different from the generality, are accounted by these as creatures of another species, and consequently not held as companions or fellows, nor considered as deserving to share in social rights; but are persecuted more or less hostilely, according as the baseness of mind and the malevolence of the people among whom they live are more or less great; because, as in the bodies of animals, nature tends always to purge herself of those humours and elements which do not assimilate with those of which their bodies are properly composed, so in the human communities the same nature directs that whoever differs greatly from his neighbours, especially if such difference is also contrariety, shall be subjected to persecution or expulsion. The good and the generous are also wont to be most hateful because usually they are sincere and call things by their right names. This fault is never pardoned by the human race, which never hates so much those who do evil, or the evil itself, as him who insists on calling evil things by their proper names. So that very often while he who does evil obtains riches, honours, and power, he who insists on giving evil names to evil things is condemned to the gallows, men being most ready to suffer either from each other or from heaven anything whatever, provided only that their ears are not offended by hard words.

II

Look through the lives of illustrious persons, and if you regard those who became so, not through authorship but through action, you will find very few truly great men who did not lose their fathers in early childhood. In the case of those families which live on the income of inherited property, the son during his father's lifetime is usually without means of his own, and consequently cannot undertake any great action; while being rich in expectation, he has no sufficient motive to exert himself to procure wealth or position, although such exertion might perhaps result in some

considerable achievement. Generally speaking, those who have accomplished great things have usually been plentifully, or at least adequately, provided with the favours of fortune from the beginning. But leaving this aside, the paternal power among all nations which have laws carries with it a sort of slavery of the children, which, as being domestic, is more stringent and more burdensome than the civil, and which, although it may be tempered by the laws themselves or by the public habitudes, or by the particular qualities of persons, never fails to produce a most hurtful effect: and this is a sentiment which the son whose father is living bears perpetually in mind; confirmed to him by the opinion which visibly and inevitably the multitude has of him. I say a sentiment of subjection and of dependence, and of not being free master of himself—indeed, of not being, so to speak, a complete person, but only a part and a member, and of belonging rather to another than to himself. Which sentiment, being more profound in the ablest of such persons, because of their more ardent spirits, through which they feel it more acutely, and more clearly discern the disadvantages of their condition, it is almost impossible for them, I will not say to accomplish, but even to plan any great action. And having been thus hampered in his youth, it cannot be expected that when at forty or fifty years of age a man becomes his own master, he will then feel a sufficient stimulus to exertion, or that if he does feel it he will then have enough energy, power, or time left for great actions. Thus is verified the saying that no good can be had in the world which is not accompanied by equal mischiefs: for the inestimable advantage of having in youth an experienced and loving guide, such as no one but a father can be, is balanced by a sort of nullity of youth and of life generally.*

* In these reflections Leopardi is evidently thinking chiefly of his own case; though there is doubtless a measure of general truth in them. But, as usual, there is a *per contra* to be urged against his arguments. Those persons whose fathers are men of fortune are at least

III

The economical wisdom of the age may be measured by the currency of the editions of books which are called *pocket*, in which the consumption of paper is little, and that of sight infinite. Nevertheless, in defence of the sparing of paper in books it may be alleged that the fashion of the age is to print much and to read nothing. To which fashion appertains also the abandonment of round characters which were used commonly in Europe in preceding centuries, and the adoption in their stead of long characters, together with the use of glazed paper; things pretty to look at, but disastrous to the eyesight, yet very proper in an age wherein books are printed not to be read, but merely looked at.

IV

What follows is not a thought, but a story, which I tell here for the reader's amusement. A friend of mine—indeed, the companion of my life, Antonio Ranieri, a youth who if he lives, and if the world does not contrive to render useless the gifts which he has from nature, will be soon sufficiently distinguished by his name alone—resided with me in 1831 at Florence. One summer evening, passing by the *Via Buia*, he found at the corner of the *piazza del duomo* (Cathedral Square), under a ground-floor window of the mansion which now belongs to the Riccardi family, many people assembled, who cried out all terrified: 'Oh, the phantom!' And looking through the window into the room where there was no other light

secured from the sordid and soul-deadening effects of poverty and uncongenial toil; and if they are men of strong will and active powers they will assuredly find out a way of using them. It would, of course, have been much better if Leopardi's father and mother had more fully appreciated their son's great genius: but after all, the source of his unhappiness was rather in his own defective physique than in his parents' unkindness.—*Editor*.

than that which was given by one of the street lamps, he himself saw what seemed to be the shadow of a woman, who waved her arms from side to side, but was otherwise motionless. But having other thoughts in his head he went on, and for the rest of that evening and all the next day the matter passed out of his mind. But a night or two after, happening to repass the same place, he found gathered there a greater crowd than before, and heard it repeating with the same terror: 'Oh, the phantom!' And looking through the window he saw again that same shadow, which still, without making any other movement, waved its arms. The window was not much higher from the ground than the height of a man, and one of the crowd, who seemed to be a police-agent (*birro*), said: 'If someone would let me mount upon his shoulders, I would climb up and see what is in there.' On which Ranieri said: 'If you will support me, I will mount.' And the other saying, 'Very well,' he climbed up and looked into the room. Close to the iron grating he saw, stretched over an armchair, a woman's black apron, which, being stirred by the wind, produced the appearance of waving arms, while resting upon the chair was a distaff, which formed the head of the spectre. This distaff Ranieri took in his hand and showed to the crowd, which thereupon, laughing at its folly, dispersed.

For what purpose this little story? For the reader's recreation, as I have said, and for a suspicion I have that still it may not be useless to historical criticism and philosophy to know that in the nineteenth century, in the very heart of Florence, which is the most civilised city in Italy, and where the people are most intelligent and cultivated, phantoms are seen which are believed to be spirits, though they are only distaffs. And let foreigners here refrain from railing, as so willingly they do at us, for it is very well known that no one of the three great nations, which, as the newspapers say, march at the head of civilisation, is less prone to believe in ghosts than are the Italians.

V

In things occult the minority always sees best, in plain things the majority. It is absurd to adduce what is called the unanimous verdict of the multitude in metaphysical questions, of which verdict no account is made in physical things, subject to the senses ; as, for example, in the question of the movement of the earth and a thousand others. And, on the contrary, it is rash, dangerous, and in the long run useless, to oppose the opinion of the majority in civil matters.

VI

Death is not an evil, for it liberates from all evils, and if it deprives man of any good thing it also takes away his desire for it. Old age is the supreme evil, for it deprives man of all pleasures, while leaving him appetites for them ; and brings with it all sufferings. Nevertheless, men fear death and desire old age.

VII

There is, strangely enough, a contempt of death, and a courage more abject and despicable than fear ; and this is that of merchants and other men devoted to money-making, who very often, for even small gains and sordid savings, obstinately refuse to take the precautions and safeguards necessary to their safety, and place themselves in extreme perils, wherein, vile heroes ! they perish by an ignoble death. Of this despicable courage there have been signal examples, not without consequences of harm and destruction to innocent people.—for instance, in the case of the bringing in the pest, called usually the cholera morbus, which has scourged the human race in recent years.

VIII

One of the grave errors into which men daily fall is that of imagining that their secrets are kept by others ; not only those secrets which they reveal in

confidence to their friends, but also those which, against their will, or despite their efforts, may happen to become known to their acquaintances. Men err, I say, always when, aware that something concerning them is known to anyone else, they fancy that it is not known to the public, no matter what injury or shame the general knowledge of it may cause them. Men restrain themselves with great difficulty, by the consideration of their own interest, from revealing their secrets; but with regard to the secrets of another no one keeps silent. If you doubt this, examine yourself and see how many times the thought of discomfort, injury, or shame which might be brought on another has restrained you from revealing a thing you knew; revealing it, I say, if not to many, at least to this or the other friend, which comes to the same thing. In social life no need is more urgent than that of gossiping, the chief means of passing the time, which is one of the first necessities of life. And no subject of gossip is more delightful than one which rouses curiosity and drives away tedium, and such is anything in the nature of a secret or a mystery. Therefore make this a rule: things you would not have it known that you have done, do not merely refrain from speaking of, but do not perform. As for those things which it is not within your power to control, be certain that they will become known, even though you may not perceive it.

IX

He who, against the opinion of others, has foretold the result of anything in the way in which it comes to pass, must not think that those who differed from him, having seen the result, will admit that he was right and allow that he was more sagacious than themselves: for either they will deny the fact or the prediction, or they will allege that the two differ in certain particulars, or in some manner they will find arguments by which they will strive to persuade both themselves and others that their opinion was right and the opposite wrong.

X

We are well aware that the greater part of the persons to whom we depute the education of the young have not been educated themselves, in the true sense of the word. Yet we trust our children to them, well knowing that they cannot possibly impart to them that which they have not themselves received or acquired.

XI

There are certain ages which in the arts and sciences, as well as in other matters, presume to *remake* all things, though they can *make* nothing.

XII

He who with difficulty and hardship, or even only after long waiting, has obtained a benefit, is indignant if he sees another obtain the same easily and quickly, though he, in fact, loses thereby nothing of what he possesses: yet such an occurrence is naturally most hateful, because in his mind the benefit he has himself received loses much of its value when he sees it bestowed upon one who has endured little or nothing in order to gain it. Therefore the workman of the Gospel parable complains of the injury done to him by an equal wage being given to those who had worked less; and the friars of certain orders are in the habit of treating all novices with much rigour, lest they should arrive easily at the state which they themselves have only attained at the cost of much hardship.

XIII

It is a fond and pleasant illusion by which the anniversary days of events, which in truth have nothing more to do with them than any other days in the year, appear to have a particular connection with them, as if a spirit of the past arose and appeared to us on those occasions, whereby the sad thought of the annihilation of that which was is partly

mitigated, and the sorrow of many losses is soothed, it seeming through those memories that what is past and will never return is not wholly extinguished and lost. As finding ourselves in places where events have happened, memorable either for themselves or in relation to us, and saying, 'Here this occurred, and here this,' we feel, so to speak, nearer to those events than when we found ourselves elsewhere; so when we say, 'This day, year, or so many years, happened such or such a thing,' this event seems to us in a manner present, or at least not so long past as on other days. And such imagination is so rooted in man that it seems hardly possible to believe that the anniversary is no more connected with the event than is any other day; wherefore the annual celebration of important memories, both religious and civil, both public and private, the days of the births and deaths of beloved persons, and other the like, is common to all the nations which have, or ever had, memories or records. And I have remarked, questioning many on the subject, that men of sensibility and accustomed to solitude, or to self-communion, are wont to be very observant of anniversaries, and to live, so to speak, on memories of the sort, always keeping them and saying, 'On the same day of the year as the present this or that thing happened to me.'

XIV

It would be no light grief to teachers, and above all to parents, if they thought, what is most true, that children, however good their natural dispositions, and whatever trouble, diligence, and expense are given to their education, will almost certainly, if death does not prevent it, become corrupted by commerce with the world. When Thales was asked by Solon why he did not marry, he answered by pointing out the anxieties of parents on account of the misfortunes and dangers of their children; but perhaps he might have more reasonably excused himself by alleging his unwillingness to increase the wickedness in the world.

XV

Chilo, numbered among the seven sages of Greece, recommended those who were strong in body to be mild in manners, in order, he said, to inspire in others reverence rather than fear. Affability and suavity of manners, and even humility, are never inappropriate in those who in beauty, or talent, or anything else much desired in the world, are manifestly superior to the generality; because the fault for which they have to obtain pardon is too serious, and the foe they have to conciliate too fierce and stubborn; the fault being superiority, the foe being envy. And this was believed by the ancients when they found themselves great and prosperous, that it was expedient to conciliate the very gods, expiating with humiliations, with offerings, and with voluntary penances the almost inextinguishable sin of happiness or excellence.

XVI

If the same end is prepared for the guilty and the innocent, says the Emperor Otho in Tacitus, it is more than can be expected of humanity to die without deserving death. Perhaps the thought is very similar of some persons, who, being naturally noble and virtuous, by living in the world and having experience of the ingratitude and the injustice of men, and the enmity which they display against their fellows, and more especially against the virtuous, become wicked, not through being corrupted or drawn by example like the weak, nor even for profit, nor through desire of any advantage which they may obtain, nor, lastly, in the hope to secure themselves against the general wickedness, but by free choice, and to vindicate themselves against men, and render them blow for blow, fighting against them with their own arms. The wickedness of such persons is so much the more profound in that it springs from experience of virtue; and so much the more formidable inasmuch as it is conjoined, as is frequently the

case, with grandeur and strength of mind, and is in fact a kind of heroism.*

XVII

As the prisons and galleys are full of people who are, by their own account, unjustly condemned, so the public offices and high places of every sort are filled by persons summoned and constrained thereto against their wills. It is almost impossible to find anyone who will confess that he deserves the punishment he endures, or sought or desired the honours he enjoys; but perhaps the latter is less possible than the former.†

XVIII

In Florence I once saw a fellow employed in the fashion of a beast of draught, as is the manner there, dragging a truck full of goods, who went with the greatest haughtiness, shouting and commanding people to make way: and he seemed to me a type of many folks who stalk through the world full of pride, and insulting others for reasons not dissimilar to his—that is, they pull a truck.

* Here Leopardi is surely very unhappily inspired. It is hard or impossible to believe that anyone naturally virtuous can become entirely vicious because he sees other men acting from vicious motives. The virtue that cannot withstand the influence of bad example is worthless, and should be called by some other name. The only virtue that is worth anything is that which cannot be corrupted. And after all, looking at the matter even from the mere point of expediency, the chances are at least as great (to put it at the lowest) that honesty will prove as profitable to a man in the long run as knavery.—*Editor.*

† Of course, Leopardi is here writing sarcastically; but surely the sarcasm on officials and persons in high places rather misses its mark. So far as my own experience goes, I have never yet found any such persons who were not only, in their own opinion, perfectly qualified for their own particular posts, but also equal to the demands of any post whatever, however exalted.—*Editor.*

XIX

There are some persons in the world who cannot get on well with their fellows in anything, because, not through inexperience nor little knowledge of social life, but through their natural dispositions they cannot abandon a certain simplicity of manners, devoid of those pretensions, and I know not what of falsehood and artificiality, which other men, perhaps not being aware of it, and even the foolish, practise and always assume in their manners, in such a way that the deportment natural to them is quite overlaid by this artificial behaviour. Those of whom I speak being obviously different from others, and supposed to be without capacity in worldly affairs, are slighted and treated badly even by inferiors, and are little attended to or obeyed by servants: for all count themselves better than they are, and regard them superciliously. Everyone who has anything to do with them tries to deceive and injure them for his own profit more than he would attempt to do with others, thinking it very easy, and that he will be able to do so with impunity, wherefore on all sides faith is broken with them, they are overreached, and their rights and dues are contested. On all occasions they are eclipsed, even by those much inferior to them, not only in talent and other intrinsic qualities, but in such as the world recognises and esteems the most, as beauty, youth, strength, courage, and even riches. Finally, no matter what their position in society, they can never obtain that degree of consideration which is universally extended even to costermongers and porters. And there is some reason in this; for it is no slight, natural disadvantage to be unable to learn, in spite of every effort, what even stupid persons easily acquire, namely, that art of manliness which alone gives men and even boys the status of men. Yet these persons, although by nature inclined to goodness, and having a better knowledge of life and of men than others, are not so simple, in spite of appearances, as to deserve the derisive epithet of being 'good': and they are devoid of

the manners of the world not through over-goodness, nor by their own choice, but because they have tried in vain to acquire them. So that nothing remains for them but to adapt their minds to their lot, and to be on their guard above all against seeking to hide or disguise that sincerity and that natural manner which are peculiar to them : because they can never come off so badly or appear so ridiculous as when they affect the ordinary affectations of others.

XX

If I had the genius of Cervantes, I would write a book to purge, as he Spain of counterfeit chivalry, so I Italy, and indeed the civilised world, of a vice which, having regard to the mildness of our present manners, and perhaps also in other respects, is not less cruel nor less barbarous than that remnant of the ferocity of the Middle Ages which the author of *Don Quixote* castigated. I speak of the vice of reading or reciting to others one's own compositions ; which vice, though very ancient, was yet until recent times a not intolerable one, because not common ; but which now, when everyone writes—and it is extremely difficult to find anyone who is not an author—has become a scourge, a public calamity, and a new tribulation for human life. And it is not a joke but the truth to say that through this vice acquaintances are suspect and friendships perilous ; and that there is no hour nor place in which an innocent person has not to fear that he will be assaulted and subjected on the spot, or dragged elsewhere, to the torture of hearing prose without end or thousands of verses, no longer under the pretext of a wish to have the listener's judgment on the merits of the composition, a pretext which formerly it was the custom to assign as the motive for such recitations, but solely and expressly to give pleasure to the author by having a listener, besides the necessary praises which the latter must bestow at the end of the reading.

Speaking seriously, I believe that in very few things

are the puerility of human nature, and the extremity of blindness and even of stupidity into which men are led by self-love and vanity, and also the extent to which the mind can cheat itself, so manifestly shown as in this business of forcing others to listen to our compositions. For everyone is conscious of the ineffable annoyance it always is to him to be compelled to listen to the compositions of others; and cannot avoid seeing his friends turn pale with alarm whenever he proposes to recite to them, and hears them allege every sort of excuse to avoid the infliction, and even sees them run away from him and shun his company as far as possible: yet with a brazen front, and with tireless persistence like that of a famished bear, he seeks and pursues his prey, no matter where it may take refuge; and having overtaken it, drags it to the place of suffering. And though, during the recitation, he perceives by the yawnings, stretchings, contortions, and a hundred other signs, the deadly agonies which the auditor is undergoing, this does not cause him to desist, but rather urges him the more fiercely to continue barking and shouting for hours, and indeed almost for entire days and nights, until he makes himself quite hoarse, and leaves off at last exhausted but not sated. Yet at such times, and while he is inflicting such torture upon his friend, it is evident that he feels an almost superhuman degree of pleasure, worthy of paradise itself: for we see him leave for this all other pleasures, forget his food and sleep, and everything else in the world. And this pleasure must arise from a firm belief in such readers that they arouse admiration in their hearers, and give delight to them: for otherwise it would be the same to them if they recited to a desert. Now, as I have said, the amount of pleasure of him who hears—I designedly say *hears*, not *listens*—everyone knows by experience, and the reciter sees it: and I know well that many would choose acute bodily suffering rather than such a pleasure. Even writings really beautiful and sublime are apt to become tedious when read by their authors: and it was remarked by a philologist, a friend of mine,

that if it is true that the Empress Octavia, hearing Virgil read the sixth book of the *Æneid*, was overcome with a fainting fit, it is probable that this was caused, not so much by the remembrance (as it is said) of her son Marcellus, as by the weariness induced by the reading.

Such is the nature of mankind. And this vice I speak of, so barbarous and so ridiculous, and so contrary to the sense of a rational creature, is really an ailment implanted in the constitution of man; for there is no nation, however civilised, no condition, nor any age, which is exempt from this infliction. Italians, French, English, Germans; venerable old men; persons wise in all other respects; men of worth and talent; men quite at home in society, quick to discern follies, and to laugh at them; all become cruel, inconsiderate children when an opportunity occurs of reciting their own compositions. And as it is now, so was it in the time of Horace, who declared it to be quite insupportable; and in that of Martial, who being asked by someone, 'Why don't you read your verses to me?' replied, 'In order that I may not have to listen to yours': and so, likewise, it was in the last ages of Greece, when, as is narrated, Diogenes the cynic, being, in company with others, all overcome with tedium at such a recitation, and at last seeing the blank page at the end of the book which was being read, said: 'Courage, friends; I see land.'

In our time, however, the business has become so serious that the supply of hearers, however obtained, no longer suffices to supply the demands of authors. Whence certain ingenious acquaintances of mine, having meditated upon this point, and being convinced that it is imperatively necessary that authors should have proper opportunities of reciting their compositions, have invented a scheme for satisfying this necessity of human nature, and of turning it also, as all such needs should be turned, to private profit. To which end they will shortly open a School, or Academy, or Athenæum of audition, where, at all hours of the day and night, they or persons employed

by them will listen to whoever wishes to read, at fixed prices: which will be, for prose, one *scudo* the first hour, two the second, four the third, eight the fourth, and so on, increasing in geometrical progression. For poetry these prices will be doubled. If the reader wishes to read any passage over again, as sometimes happens, an extra *lira* per line will be charged. If any of the listeners fall asleep in the course of the reading, they shall forfeit one-third of the fees due to them. To provide against the occurrence of swoons, convulsions, and other accidents, slight or serious, which may chance, the institution will be supplied with essences and medicines which shall be furnished gratis. Thus will the ears, hitherto unprofitable, be rendered a source of remuneration, and a new pathway for industry, to the increase of the general wealth, be opened.

XXI

In conversing we never feel any lively and lasting pleasure, except in so far as we are allowed to speak of ourselves, and of the things with which we are occupied, or which appertain to us in some manner. All other discourse very soon becomes tedious; and this, pleasant as it is to us, is mortally tedious to the listener. A reputation for amiability can only be acquired at the price of patient endurance, for he only is amiable in conversation who ministers to the self-love of others, and who is willing to listen much and speak little—a most irksome thing. He must let others speak of themselves and of their own affairs as much as they please, and in fact must himself lead them on to such subjects; so that at parting *they* go away in a perfect state of self-satisfaction, and *he* is bored to death. If we retire from any company in a pleasant state of satisfaction with ourselves, and with a good opinion of our companions, we may be pretty sure that they have formed an unfavourable opinion of us. The conclusion is that in all conversations, whether in a large or small party, where the

object is or should be mutual friendship, it usually happens that the satisfaction of one person is gained at the expense of the boredom of another. You must make up your mind either to be wearied to death, or to shine at the risk of offending others ; and you will be lucky if these results fall to your lot in anything like equal shares.

XXII

I do not know which is the more difficult—to decide whether it is really contrary to the first principles of politeness to speak of self at length and habitually, or to find a man who is free from this failing.

XXIII

The common saying that life is a scenic representation is verified above all in this, that the world speaks constantly in one manner, and acts constantly in another. In which comedy in our days all are actors, because all speak in one mode ; and scarcely any are spectators, because the empty language of the world deceives none but children and fools ; it follows that the said representation has become a perfectly vain thing, tedium and toil without motive. Therefore it would be an enterprise worthy of our age to render life at last an affair not simulated, but real, and to conciliate for the first time in the history of the world the famous discordance between words and deeds. A sufficient experience having shown that the facts are immutable, and that it is useless any longer for men to attempt the impossible, the discord might be at once harmonised by an expedient easy and unique, although never yet attempted ; namely, by altering our language, and calling things once for all by their proper names.

XXIV

Unless I am much mistaken, it is very rare to find in our days a person generally praised whose praise has not begun in his own mouth. So great is the

egotism of men, and so great are the envy and hatred which men bear to one another, that if you wish to win a name it is not sufficient to do praiseworthy actions, but you must yourself eulogise them, or find, what comes to the same thing, someone who will extol and magnify them continually, intoning them with a loud voice in the ears of the public, thus constraining people by example and by boldness and perseverance to re-echo at least a part of those praises. Do not think that anyone will ever praise you without being prompted to do so, for any merit you may show, or any excellence your work may exhibit. Most men will only look on in silence, and perhaps seek to hinder others from seeing your merit. He who would raise himself, even by true worth, must cast aside modesty. The world is like women in this respect ; nothing is to be gained from it by modesty and reticence.

XXV

No one is so completely disenchanted with the world, nor knows it so thoroughly, nor is so much disgusted with it, but that when it begins to smile upon him he becomes partially reconciled to it. It is so even in the case of one whom we know to be a bad man, but who salutes us courteously, and by that action makes us think somewhat better of him. Which observations avail to illustrate the weakness of human nature, not to justify the world or the bad man.

XXVI

Those who have had little experience of life—and sometimes, indeed, the well-experienced—when some misfortune has overtaken them, especially when it is by no fault of their own, considering what their friends and acquaintances, or men in general, will think of their affliction, expect to receive from them nothing but comfort and sympathy, not to speak here of help ; and even hope that they will receive from them more friendship or more regard than before.

Nothing is farther from their thoughts than that henceforth, on account of their misfortunes, they will become, as it were, degraded in society, be regarded in the eyes of the world as if they were guilty of some crime, and fallen into disgrace with their friends and acquaintances, who will forthwith abandon them, and from a distance enjoy the event and hold them in derision. Similarly, if some piece of good fortune comes to them, one of their first thoughts is to consider how much pleasure it will give to their friends to share with them their joy, thinking that these will even rejoice more at their good fortune than they do themselves: nor do they suppose for a moment that instead of this the faces of their dear friends at the news of their good luck will be clouded and distorted and reveal their disgust; that many at first will refuse to believe the tidings, and will then set themselves to diminish in their own estimation, as well as in that of others, their happiness: that the friendship of others, because of this, will grow lukewarm, and even in some few change itself into hate; and that, finally, not a few will do all that they can to despoil them of their newly gained fortune. Thus are the imaginations of men, and even the suggestions of reason, remote from and abhorrent to the actualities of life.

XXVII

Nothing indicates more clearly that one has little wisdom and little philosophy than to desire that everything in life shall be wise and philosophical.

XXVIII

The human race and every small portion of it, the individual excepted, consists of two classes — those who govern and those who submit to be governed. As neither laws, nor force, nor the progress of philosophy or civilisation can prevent a man from belonging to one class or the other, all that he can do is to choose between them, if choice is open to him, which it often is not.

XXIX

No profession is so profitless as that of literature ; yet so much is the value of imposture in the world that with its aid even literature becomes fruitful. Imposture is the soul, so to speak, of social life, and an art, without which veritably no art and no faculty, considered in regard to its effects on human minds, is perfect. Always when you examine the fortunes of two persons, of whom the one is of real worth in any art, the other of only seeming worth, you will find that the latter is more fortunate than the former ; indeed, in most instances the latter is fortunate, the former unfortunate. Imposture avails and secures results even without any merit ; while merit without it can do nothing. Nor does this arise, I believe, from any perversity in mankind, but from the fact that the naked truth always appears so poor and unattractive that in order to impress or move men it is necessary to heighten and colour it with some portion of illusion and prestige, so that they may be induced to think it a much more alluring thing than it really is. Nature herself practises imposture towards man, and only renders life dear or supportable to him by means of imagination and illusion.

XXX

As the human race is wont, blaming present things, to extol things past, so most travellers, while travelling, are in love with their native land, and prefer it with a sort of anger to those in which they find themselves. Returned to their native place, they with the same anger rank it inferior to all the other countries in which they have travelled.

XXXI

In every country the universal faults and evils of mankind are set down as local peculiarities. I have never been in a part where I have not heard : ‘ Here the women are vain and inconstant, read little, and are badly educated ; here people are curious about

other people's business, babblers, and scandalmongers ; here gold, favour, and vileness are all powerful ; here envy reigns and friendships have little sincerity, and so forth ; as if elsewhere things were different. Men are miserable by necessity, and determined to believe, themselves miserable by accident.

XXXII

The more a man becomes experienced in practical knowledge of life, the more he relaxes that severity of judgment which makes the youthful, always seeking perfection and expecting to find it, and measuring all things by the ideas which they have in their minds, so reluctant to pardon the defects or to do justice to the rare and defective virtues, or to the minor good qualities which they meet with in men. Then finding that all things are imperfect, and becoming convinced that there is nothing better than that little good they formerly despised, and that hardly any thing or person is truly estimable, little by little, having changed their standpoint, and comparing what comes before them, no longer with perfection but with reality, they become used to judge liberally, and to respect every mediocre virtue, every shadow of worth, every slight ability they meet with ; so that finally many things and many persons appear to them praiseworthy that at first would have seemed to them hardly endurable. And so far do they change their opinions, that whereas in the beginning they saw scarcely anything to admire, in process of time they learn to tolerate almost all things, especially when they are more than usually intelligent. For in truth the being very contemptuous and hard to please when youth is past is not a good sign ; it shows either a want of intelligence, or of experience, or of knowledge of the world ; or else such persons belong to that class of vain and senseless creatures who despise others because of the great conceit which they have of themselves. In fine, it is true, though it seems incredible, that the more one knows of the world the more tolerant one

becomes of it ; which, however, signifies only that one realises more and more its essential vileness.

XXXIII

Commonplace deceivers, and women generally, always believe that their deceptions have succeeded, and that the persons practised upon do not suspect their trickeries : but the more astute doubt, knowing on the one hand the difficulties of the art, and on the other the possibility that they may be themselves deceived, and that the same thing which they are trying to do, that is to deceive, others also are attempting ; so that from these causes it often happens that the would-be deceiver is himself deceived. Besides, the really astute deceivers do not fall into the error of thinking that men generally are so foolish as the less intelligent ones are wont to imagine.

XXXIV

Some young men are apt to fancy that they render themselves interesting to others by an affectation of melancholy. And possibly this feigned melancholy may please for a time, especially women. But genuine melancholy is shunned by everyone ; and in the long run only cheerfulness pleases and is well received in society ; for, when all is said, and whatever may be thought by the young men I have mentioned, the world, wisely enough, prefers rather to laugh than to weep.

XXXV

In some places where civilisation and barbarism meet and mingle—as, for example, Naples—one observes more particularly a thing which is, it is true, evident everywhere ; which is that a man reputed poor is scarcely looked upon as a man at all, while persons believed to be wealthy are always in imminent peril. Whence it follows that your best plan, when you find yourself in such places, is to do as is there generally done—that is, conceal as far as possible your financial

status, so that the public may not know whether it should despise or murder you. Thus you will be treated as men are ordinarily—that is, half-despised and half-respected, sometimes threatened with injury and sometimes left unmolested.

XXXVI

Many persons, even when they are acting basely towards us, nevertheless expect us, under penalty of their hatred, neither to put any obstacle in the way of their baseness nor to consider them as base.

XXXVII

No human quality is more intolerable in ordinary life, nor is, in fact, less tolerated than intolerance.

XXXVIII

As the art of fencing is useless when two fencers equal in skill combat together, because the one has no more advantage over the other than if they were both unskilled, so it often happens that men act falsely and maliciously, gratuitously and without advantage, since they meet with an equal degree of falsehood and malice in their adversaries, so that the result is the same as if each acted sincerely and straightforwardly. There is no doubt that, all things considered, wickedness and duplicity are only useful when they are backed by superior force, or when they encounter a less degree of cunning and wickedness in others; or are matched against true probity, which last case is rare, while the second is not common, because the majority of men are very nearly equal in wickedness. If men, instead of doing all the evil they can to one another, in order to obtain some good for themselves, which costs them much trouble and in which they often fail, would simply seek to do good to their fellows, they might then easily gain the objects they desire.

XXXIX

Baldassar Castiglione, in his *Courtier*, accounts very happily for the fact that the old are wont to praise the time when they were young and to be discontented with the present. The cause, he says, of this false opinion in the old is that the years in their flight deprive men of many pleasures, and among other things take from the blood a great part of the animal spirits, whence the constitution changes and the organs become weak through which the soul manifests its powers. As in autumn the leaves fall from the trees, so in age fall from our hearts the sweet flowers of contentment, and in place of the clear and serene thoughts of youth we are haunted by cloudy and turbid melancholy, accompanied by countless calamities : so that not only the body, but the mind, becomes infirm, nor of the pleasures of the past retains aught but a tenacious remembrance, together with a picture heightened by imagination, of the happiness then enjoyed. In dwelling upon this period it appears to us that heaven and earth and all things kept perpetual festival and smiled gloriously upon us ; and in our thoughts, as in a delightful and lovely garden, the sweet spring season flourishes once more. Wherefore it would perhaps be well if, when the sun of our lives begins to decline and to deprive us of our pleasures, we then lost our remembrance also, and could acquire what Themistocles called the art of forgetting, since our senses are so apt to deceive us and thereby mislead our reasoning faculties. So that (said Castiglione) it appears to me that the old are in the position of those who, leaving port, fix their eyes upon the land, so that it seems to them that the ship stands firm and the shore recedes ; whereas, in fact, the port and time and pleasures remain as they were, while we, sailing on with the ship of mortality, go one after the other to that tempestuous sea which absorbs and devours all things, nor are we ever permitted to return again to the land ; but after being long buffeted about by adverse winds our ship is at last rent to pieces on the

rocks. Old men, because of their infirmities, are unable to taste the pleasures of life, which to them have lost their savour, even as, to those suffering from fever, all wines taste most bitter, although really fine and delicate in flavour. Yet they retain their appetite, for pleasures in spite of the fact that they can no longer enjoy them, and although they now seem stale and insipid to them, and far different from those which they formerly enjoyed, notwithstanding the fact that the things are in reality just the same as they always were. Thus, resenting their disabilities, they lament and blame the times as being out of joint, not discerning that it is they, and not the times, that have deteriorated. And, on the contrary, remembering the past pleasures, they recall also the time in which they enjoyed them, and therefore praise it as having been good, because its remembrance brings back to them something of the happiness which they felt when it was present, since the mind abhors all things which are associated with its sufferings, and loves those which are associated with its happiness.

Thus Castiglione, expounding, as Italian prose-writers are wont, an indubitable truth in language not less beautiful than redundant: in confirmation of which it may be remarked that the old think the present inferior to the past, not only in the things which depend on man, but likewise in those which do not depend upon him, accusing them similarly of having changed for the worse, not only, as is true, with respect to their own condition, but generally in themselves. I believe that everyone must have heard frequently from his elders, as I remember to have heard from mine, that the years have become colder than they used to be, and the winters longer, and that in their youth, before or about Easter-day, they were wont to leave off their winter clothes and wear those of summer, which change nowadays, according to them, can hardly be made until May, and sometimes not before June. And not many years since certain naturalists seriously investigated the cause of such supposed lower temperature of the seasons, and one

alleged the disafforesting of the mountains, and another I know not what other things to explain a fact which had no existence ; since, on the contrary, it may be gathered from various passages in the ancient authors that Italy, in the time of the Romans, must have been colder than it is now. And this is most probable, because it is otherwise manifest by experience and by natural causes that the progressive civilisation of men renders the air in the countries inhabited by them milder, which effect has been, and is, singularly conspicuous in America, where, almost within our own memory, a mature civilisation has succeeded, in part to a state of barbarism, in part to absolute solitude. But the old, whom the cold discomforts much more than it did in their youth, believe that the change which their own constitution has undergone has taken place in nature itself, and imagine that the warmth which continues decreasing in them decreases rather in the air or the earth, which imagination is so rooted that the very same thing which our elders affirm to us was affirmed by the old, to go no further back, a century and a half ago by the contemporaries of Magalotti, who, in his familiar letters, wrote :—‘ It certainly appears that the ancient order of the seasons is getting more and more perverted. Here, in Italy, it is a common assertion and complaint that there are no longer any gradual weather changes, and in this alteration of the seasons there can be no doubt that the cold gains ground. I have heard my father say that in his youth at Rome everyone put on summer clothes on Easter morning. Now, at that time, whoever does not need to pledge his shirt will tell you that he takes good care not to take off any of the clothing which he wore in the depth of winter.’

This was written by Magalotti in 1683. Italy would be now colder than Greenland if from that year to this it had been continually getting colder at the rate then asserted. It is almost unnecessary to add that the continual cooling which is said to go on through internal causes in the body of the earth has no relation at all to the present question, being, through its

•

slowness, not perceptible in many centuries, much less in a few years.

XL

Speaking much of self is extremely odious. But young men, and especially those who are of an energetic nature, and of a spirit above the commonplace, can scarcely guard themselves against this fault; and so they speak of their own affairs with the utmost candour, thinking that everyone must necessarily be almost as much interested in them as they are themselves. And they are pardoned for thus acting; not so much on account of their inexperience as because the need which they have of help, of counsel, and of some outlet in words for the passions with which they are agitated is manifest. And it also seems to be generally recognised that a sort of right belongs to the young of expecting the world to be interested in the things which seem to be so vastly important to them.

XLI

It is seldom reasonable for a man to be offended by things said of him when he is not present, and which are not intended to reach his ears; for if he will consult his memory and examine his own conduct he will find that he has no friend, however dear, and that he holds no person in such veneration but that he will in their absence express himself in such a way about them that it would give them much annoyance if they became acquainted with his expressions. Though our self-love is so exceedingly tender and meticulous that it is almost impossible that what is spoken of us, if faithfully reported to us, shall not seem to us unworthy or little worthy of us, yet, on the other hand, our own conduct conforms to the precept of not doing to others what we would not like done to ourselves, and we do not hesitate to use the greatest freedom in our strictures upon others.

XLII

When a man has reached the age of twenty-five, or has a little overpassed it, he experiences a new sensation when he discovers that he is regarded by many of his companions as being considerably more advanced in life than they are. When he comes to reflect upon this he perceives, of course, that there are, in fact, a great many people in the world who are younger than he is, though he has hitherto been accustomed to consider himself as in the first bloom of youth. He may indeed have felt himself to be inferior to others in many things; but at least in the gift of youth he had thought that he was unsurpassed, since those who were younger than he were regarded by him as little more than boys, and consequently as being of little account in the world. But now he begins to realise the fact that the boon of youth, which hitherto he has regarded as forming, as it were, an attribute of his nature and of his essence, so that he could hardly imagine himself as being without it, is only given to him for a season, and he resolves henceforth to cherish it, both for its own sake and because of the manner in which its loss may affect him in the estimation of other people. Certainly it can be said with truth of no person of sensibility, when he has passed the age of twenty-five, after which the flower of youth begins rapidly to fade, that he has not experienced misfortune; for even if the lot of such a one has been uniformly prosperous, yet when that age is passed he will be conscious of an irreparable misfortune, and one perhaps the more bitter because in other things he has been fortunate; that is, of the decline or of the end of his beloved youth.

XLIII

Those persons from whom, being intimate with them, you may be sure that you will receive no injury, though you need not expect to obtain any benefit, are, as the world goes, men of unusual integrity.

XLIV

If you question the subordinates of a magistrate or of any member of the government about the qualities and conduct of their superior, especially as regards his official duties, even when the answers agree as to facts, you will find great discrepancies in the interpretation of them ; but even if the interpretations should agree, you will find that the judgments are infinitely discordant, one blaming what another extols. But on the point as to whether he abstains or not from taking advantage of his position for his own pecuniary good by helping himself at the expense of others or of the state, you will not find any persons who, agreeing on the facts, disagree in their interpretation of them, or in their judgment upon them. All will praise the magistrate who refrains from speculation, and condemn him who indulges in it. And it appears that it is only by their probity or improbity in money matters that magistrates are estimated as good or bad. A good magistrate is an honest one ; a bad is a greedy or dishonest one. It seems that a public official can dispose as he pleases of the life, of the honour, and of almost all that belongs to the citizens ; and let him do what he will, he will receive nothing but praise so long as he does not touch their money. Thus it appears that men, differing in everything else, are of one mind with regard to their esteem for wealth ; and that they look upon a man's money, and his money alone, as being essentially the man himself : and indeed it is evident by a thousand signs that this is really held by the human race as an unquestioned axiom, especially at the present time. Concerning which a French philosopher of the last century said, 'The ancients were always speaking of morals and virtue, the moderns speak of nothing but money and commerce.' And with good reason, adds some student of political economy, or disciple of the philosophical gazettes ; for virtue and morality cannot exist unless founded upon industry, which, providing for men's daily wants, and rendering life comfortable and secure for all classes of

society, gives a firm basis for the virtues and makes them universal. Very good. But somehow, in company with industry, baseness of mind, coldness of heart, egotism, avarice, mercantile falsehood and fraud, all the qualities most depraving and most unworthy of civilised mankind, flourish vigorously and multiply without end; but where are the virtues?

XLV

The great remedy for calumny, as for afflictions of the heart, is time. If people find fault with our principles or our conduct, good or bad, the best course is to pay no regard to them, and go on as before. After a short time the subject will become stale, and the slanderers will cease talking about it, in order to hunt the trail of some fresh scandal. And the more we show ourselves steadfast and consistent in pursuing our own course, regardless of all idle gossip, so much the sooner will that which was at first condemned as strange or unreasonable be seen in another light and acknowledged as rational and sensible. The world always comes round in the end to the views of those who firmly persist in following their own path, and ends finally by giving up its own opinions and adopting theirs. Whence it results, as is well known, that the weak live as the world wills, and the strong as they will themselves.

XLVI

It does not reflect much honour, I know not whether to say upon men or upon virtue, to find that in all civilised languages, ancient and modern, the same words signify *goodness* and *silliness*, an *honest* man and a *weak-witted* one. Several words of this kind, as in Italian *dabbenaggine* (good nature, simplicity); or in Greek, *εὐθής*, *εὐθεία* (honesty), have entirely lost their original signification, in which perhaps little use would be found for them, and are now only used in their secondary or bad sense. Such an estimate of *goodness* has been made in all times by the multitude, whose

judgments and inmost sentiments are often manifested, even in spite of themselves, in their familiar conversation. The constant opinion of the multitude, however it may be disguised by the misuse of words, is that no one who could choose would choose to be good: the weak-witted are good, because they are unable to be otherwise.

XLVII

Man is condemned either to waste his youth to no good purpose, though youth is the only time in which he can make provision for his age or for his daily wants, or to spend it in preparing enjoyment for the time when he will no longer be fit to enjoy.

XLVIII

How great the love is which nature has implanted in us for our fellows may be judged by what we see whenever an animal or an inexperienced child happens to catch sight of its own image in some mirror. Believing this to be a creature like itself, it bursts into fury and frenzy, and tries in every way to injure or kill that creature. Domesticated birds, gentle as they are by nature and habit, will dash themselves angrily against the mirror, scolding it, with wings extended, and pecking at it. In the same way, an ape, if he is allowed, will throw the mirror to the ground, and break it, if he can.

XLIX

Naturally the animal hates its like, and whenever its own interests demand attempts to harm it. Therefore neither the hate nor the injuries of men can be avoided, but it is possible to escape their contempt. The extreme respect which the young and the inexperienced pay to those with whom they are brought into contact, not through servility or through motives of interest, but through an amiable desire not to incur enmity and to gain friends, profits them, for the

reason I have mentioned, little or not at all. Not only do they not succeed in gaining their object, but, in some degree at least, they even injure their own prospects, because those to whom they thus pay their court become through these very courtesies more vain of themselves, and more apt to look down upon those who thus flatter them. He who does not seek fame or other benefits from men should not seek to gain their love, for that cannot be won. Such a one I would advise to maintain carefully his personal dignity, rendering no more than is their due to anyone. He will thus be hated and persecuted rather more than he would otherwise be, but he will not be disdained. In a Hebrew book of maxims and sayings, which some assert is translated from the Arabic, while others maintain that it is the work of a Hebrew author, among many things of little account we read that a certain sage, I know not who, on someone saying to him, 'I wish you well,' replied, 'Oh, why not? Since you are neither of my faith, nor my relative, nor neighbour, nor one of my supporters.' Our hatred towards our like is the more intense according to the nearness of the resemblance. The young are for many reasons more eager for friendship than their elders. Nevertheless, a lasting friendship is almost impossible between two young men who lead a similar life--I mean that sort of so-called life which is principally devoted to gallantry. Indeed between such as these it is almost impossible that it should last, through their rivalry in love and the jealousies which inevitably arise between them; and because, as Madame de Staël remarks, a man's prosperity in love affairs always gives displeasure even to his best friends. Women are, after money, the subject on which men are the least reasonable and the least apt to agree, and on which acquaintances, friends, brothers, change their nature and conduct towards each other; for men are friends and relatives, and indeed are men and civilised beings, not as far as the altar, as the old proverb has it, but as far as money and women: herein they become savages and brutes. And in affairs connected

with women, if the barbarity is less, the envy is greater than it is concerning money : or to express it better, therein a man's self-love is more deeply interested; and this is, of all the passions, the one wherein he is most sensitive. And although everyone at some time or other does the same thing, no one is ever seen engaged in pleasant or sentimental conversation with a woman without its awaking in all who witness it a feeling of bitter derision, which manifests itself either inwardly or outwardly. Wherefore, although 'nalf of the pleasure in successes of this kind, and also for the most part in others, consists in recounting them, the talk about their amorous triumphs which young men indulge in is wholly out of place, especially with other young men : for such conversation always causes vexation ; and even if they tell no more than the truth, they expose themselves to mockery.

LI

Seeing how seldom men are guided in their actions by a correct judgment of what will profit or injure them, it is clear that we must often delude ourselves when we attempt to forecast the way in which another person will act under certain circumstances, by a consideration of the course which it is best for him in his own interest to adopt. Guiciardini says, in the beginning of his seventeenth book, writing of the discussions about the course which Francis I., King of France, would be likely to adopt on his liberation from the fortress of Madrid : 'Perhaps those who argued about it considered rather what Francis ought in reason to do than considered what, being a Frenchman with the qualities and defects of his countrymen, he was likely to do ; an error very commonly made by those who attempt to judge the dispositions or purposes of others.' Guiciardini is perhaps the sole historian among the moderns who had both known mankind and reflected deeply upon the facts of human nature, and who was not misled by a false political science, having no foundation in the knowledge or experience

of life, and therefore for the most part chimerical ; being in this respect unlike those historians, and more particularly those beyond the Alps and beyond the seas, who have preferred rather to theorise about events than to narrate them in the order of their occurrence, as the majority of annalists have been content to do.

LII

Let no one think he has learned how to live if he has not learned to regard as the merest idle talk the offers of service which are made to him by friends or acquaintances : and most of all those which seem the most spontaneous, no matter how earnest they may seem, nor how often repeated they may be. You should distrust not only such offers as these ; but even the entreaties and urgent invitations to avail yourself of their services which many persons will press upon you ; even when they specify the mode in which they propose to help you, and, should you raise difficulties, try to argue you out of them. For if at last you are persuaded, or if, out of weariness at his importunities, or from any other cause, you put one of these to the test and ask him for his aid in some affair, you will see him suddenly turn pale ; and without giving you an answer he will begin to talk of something else or utter words without significance ; and as soon as he can he will take his departure. After that you will be not a little fortunate if you are able to encounter him for months to come ; or if, writing to him, you get a reply. Men, in fact, have no real desire to bestow benefits on others ; firstly, because it is troublesome to do so ; and secondly, because the misfortunes of our friends or acquaintances always yield us a certain degree of pleasure*. They love, however, to be thought benevolent, to receive the gratitude of others, and to feel that sense of superiority which comes from

* Leopardi, no doubt, was here thinking of Rochefoucauld's well-known and perhaps most cynical maxim, though he probably did not remember at the moment whence his thought was derived.—*Editor*.

having conferred a favour. Therefore, they offer you what they do not want to give, and the more unwilling they find you to accept it, the more they insist, firstly, to humble your pride and make you blush; and secondly, because they have so much the less fear that you will take them at their word. Thus they will with the utmost confidence press the matter with the greatest apparent earnestness, in spite of the risk they run of being proved impostors, in the hope of gaining your gratitude cheaply and easily. But the instant you show signs that you are willing to avail yourself of their offers they take to flight.

LIII

It was a saying of Bion, the ancient philosopher, that it was impossible to please the multitude except by becoming a sweetmeat, or a rich wine. But this impossibility, as long as the social state exists, will always be sought after, even by those who say and perhaps believe that they are indifferent to it. So, even the wisest of men, who might be expected to know that happiness is unattainable, will nevertheless continue to hope and seek for it as long as the human race exists.

LIV

It may be taken as a general axiom that men, save for brief intervals, will never cease, in spite of the plainest evidence and certainty of the contrary, to believe within themselves, though they may conceal their beliefs from others, those things which it is necessary for them to believe in order that they may preserve their tranquillity of mind, or, so to speak, their motive for living. The old man, especially if he lives in society, never ceases to believe in his inmost mind, though he may in public protest the contrary, that he is still able, by a singular exception to the universal rule, by a mystery inexplicable even to himself, to make a favourable impression upon the fair sex : for his condition would be too miserable if he was

completely persuaded that he could no longer enjoy that happiness in which all men, more or less, desire to participate. A woman of intrigue, although she sees every day a thousand signs of the public opinion with regard to her, firmly believes that she is generally looked upon as an honest woman by the major portion of her own sex, and that the truth about her is only known to a small number of her new and old intimates (small, I mean, in relation to the public), who not only conceal her secret from the world generally, but even as far as possible from each other. The man of evil disposition, whose very baseness and cowardice leads him to fear the opinions of others, believes that his actions are interpreted in the most favourable light, and that their true nature is not understood. Similarly in material things, Buffon observed that the sick man at the point of death does not really believe his doctors or his friends, but hopes to the last that he will escape from his present peril. I pass over the stupendous credulity and incredulity of husbands concerning their wives, the inexhaustible subject for novels, plays, mockery, and laughter in all those nations in which marriage is irrevocable. And thus it might be shown that there is nothing in the world so false and absurd that it is not held for true by the most sensible persons, whenever the mind is unable to accommodate itself to the contrary belief, and to rest quiet in it. I will not omit the fact that the old are less disposed than the young to believe those things which are displeasing to them; for the young have more courage to look evils in the face, and to sustain themselves against them or to die from them.

LV

A woman is ridiculed if she sincerely mourns for her dead husband; and yet if for some good reason she appears in society, or puts off her mourning garments a day before the usual time she will be sharply censured. It is a trite axiom that the world contents itself with appearances; but it should also be said that

the world does not care for the reality, and therefore neglects it, and sometimes detests it. The ancients studied rather to be good than to seem so : nowadays, the world bids us appear good, but be otherwise in reality.

LVI

Frankness may be useful when it is employed as an artifice, or when, owing to its rarity, no one puts faith in it.

LVII

Men are ashamed, not of the injuries they inflict, but of those they receive. Therefore the only way to shame wrongdoers is to pay them back in their own coin.

LVIII

The timid have not less self-esteem than the arrogant ; rather more—or, let us say, they are more sensitive, and therefore not so bold ; and so they take care not to wound others, not because they respect them more than the arrogant and the audacious, but to avoid being wounded themselves, since they suffer so intensely from every slight pin-prick.

LIX

It has often been remarked that as the real virtues in a nation decay and disappear, the counterfeit ones become more and more common. It seems that literature is subject to the same law, since in our own time, along with a vast improvement in the methods of printing, there is a corresponding decline, I will not say in the art of good writing, but even in the knowledge that there is any distinction between a good and bad style. No classic work was ever printed in former times so elegantly as newspapers and other political ephemera are now printed ; but the art of writing is now a thing of the past, and when you talk of it people hardly know what you mean. And I believe that every sensible man, when he opens or reads a

modern book, cannot help feeling disgusted that such excellent paper and such elegant type should be wasted upon such vile phrases and on thoughts so vapid.

LX

La Bruyère very truly remarks that it is easier for a mediocre book to acquire fame by virtue of the reputation already won by its author, than for an unknown author to win reputation by means of an excellent work. To this it may be added, that about the shortest way to acquire fame is to affirm with assurance and pertinacity, and in as many modes as possible, that you have already acquired it.

LXI

Leaving youth behind him, a man loses the faculty of communicating, and, so to speak, inspiring himself into others ; and thus loses also that kind of influence which the youth exercises on those around him, and which draws them to him and makes them always feel for him a sort of inclination. Realising this, he experiences, not without a new pain, that in the companies which he enters he is now one by himself, and is little more regarded by those around him than he would be if they were unconscious of his presence.

LXII

The first condition of being ready to risk one's life on a proper occasion is to have a good esteem of one's self.

LXIII

The degree in which the artist esteems his art, or the scientist his science, is usually in inverse proportion to the degree in which he esteems his own merit in those arts.

c. LXIV

The artist, man of science, or student of any of the learned professions, who is accustomed to compare himself, not with his fellow-students, but with the lofty idea which he has of his art itself, will always have a poor opinion of his own achievements ; because, realising its infinite profundity, he must needs be conscious of his own inferiority. Thus, almost all great men are modest ; because they compare themselves continually, not with others, but with the idea of perfection which is always in their minds—an idea infinitely higher and greater than that which is entertained by the vulgar—and so they realise how far they are from attaining their aim. Whereas the vulgar, having a much lower ideal of perfection in their minds, easily persuade themselves that they have reached, or even surpassed, that ideal.

LXV

No society can please for any length of time, save that of persons by whom we desire to be well esteemed. Therefore women, if they desire that their society shall always be welcome to us, ought to study so to comport themselves that men shall always desire to gain or preserve their esteem.

LXVI

In the present century the black races are held to have had a totally different origin from the white ones ; and yet it is held that there is an absolute equality between them as regards moral and legal rights. In the sixteenth century the blacks were thought to have sprung from the same root as the whites, and to be of the same family ; while yet it was maintained, and especially by the Spanish ecclesiastics, that as regards rights they were, by nature and by the divine will, very much our inferiors. And in the one and the other century the blacks were and are bought and sold, and made toilers in chains under the lash. So much for ethics ; and so much for the influence which moral considerations have over the actions of men !

LXVII

With little propriety is it said that life-weariness (*la noia*) is a common evil. It is common to be unemployed, or rather idle; not life-weary. Life-weariness does not exist save in those in whom the spirit is something. The more powerful the spirit is in anyone, the more is life-weariness frequent, painful and terrible. The majority of men find sufficient employment in anything, and sufficient satisfaction in any stupid employment; nor do they suffer much when altogether unemployed. It is for this reason that men of sensibility are so little understood when they complain of life-weariness. When they speak of it with that gravity which is used concerning the greatest and most inevitable ills of life, they only provoke the wonder or the laughter of the vulgar.

LXVIII

Life-weariness is in some respects the most sublime of human sentiments. Not that I believe that from the investigation of this sentiment those conclusions result which many philosophers have thought to gather from it; but nevertheless, to be unable to find satisfaction in any earthly thing, or, so to say, in the whole earth; to consider the inestimable amplitude of space, the number and astonishing mass of the worlds, and find that all is little and petty to the capacity of our soul; to imagine the number of the worlds infinite, and the universe infinite, and feel that our soul and our desire would be still greater than such a universe; always to accuse things of insufficiency and nullity, and endure that want and emptiness which we call life-weariness; this seems to me the greatest sign of grandeur and nobleness which human nature presents. Let it also be noted that life-weariness is scarcely known to insignificant persons, and very little or not at all to the lower animals.

LXIX

From the well-known letter of Cicero to Lucceius, in which he recommends the latter to compose a history of Catiline's conspiracy, and from another letter, not so well known, but not less curious, in which⁶ the Emperor Verus begs his tutor, Fronto, to write an account of the Parthian war, which the Emperor had conducted, with which request Fronto complied: letters which exactly resemble those which are now often written to journalists, save that the writers in our own times ask for newspaper articles, while the ancients asked for books; from these, I say, it may be inferred how trustworthy history is, even when related by contemporary writers, who enjoyed much credit in their own time.

LXX

Very many of those errors which are termed childish, into which young men on their first entrance into the world, and also those who, whether young or old, are condemned by nature to be more than men, and always to appear children, are accustomed to fall, consist when well considered only in this: that such persons think and act as if men were less childish than they are in reality. Assuredly that which first, and perhaps above everything else, strikes with wonder the minds of well-educated young men on their entrance into the world, is the frivolity of the ordinary occupations, the pastimes, the talk, the inclinations, and the dispositions of society in general. Most of them, it is true, soon become accustomed to this frivolous mode of life, and adapt themselves to it, though not without pain and difficulty. It appears to them at first that they have become children again; and so it really is for those who have been well educated and who possess good natural abilities. Such persons, when they commence to live, as it is called, must, as it were, retrace their course and infantilise themselves as much as possible. They discover that it was a delusion to imagine that it was



their business to become men in their thoughts and actions and to put away all remnants of childhood. For, on the contrary, men in general, however old they grow in years, always continue to live in great part like children.

LXXI

It follows from the above-mentioned opinion — I mean from the youth's erroneous belief that men are more manly than they really are—that he is much more distressed than he need be at every fault that he commits, thinking that he must thereby have lost the esteem of all who saw his error, and of those also to whom it may be made known. But when he finds, not without wonder, that they treat him just as they did before, he quickly regains his self-esteem. Mature men seldom trouble themselves about such things, for if they did they would have little else to do. They pardon and forget their own errors because of their number, and because they continually see others committing the same faults. Nor do they trouble themselves about consistency, admiring to-day what perhaps they derided yesterday. And often we ourselves blame, not seldom very severely, or ridicule some absent friend, whom nevertheless we do not disesteem, and whom we treat in the same manner as before when we again encounter him.

LXXII

As the youth is deceived in this case by want of confidence in himself, so hope deceives those who, perceiving that they have lost the esteem of anyone, attempt to regain his good opinion by means of services and flatteries. Esteem is not the prize of obsequiousness, and is not unlike friendship in this respect—it resembles a flower, which, when once trodden down or withered, never regains its lustre. By such self-humiliations (the word is not too strong) nothing is gained, and the suitor is only the more disdained. It is true that the disdain of others, even when unjust, is so hard to endure that few of those

who are subject to it are strong enough to remain unaffected by it, and therefore most of them attempt by various means, usually fruitless, to deliver themselves from it. And it is common enough for persons of mediocre station or abilities to assume a proud and disdainful aspect with those who seem to desire to gain their good opinion ; but should the latter thereupon show signs of indifference, or of not caring for them, they at once humble themselves and stoop to any means, even vile ones, to regain their attention. But for this very reason the course to take if anyone shows that he disdains you is to pay him back with as much or greater disdain, because according to every probability you will then see his pride change itself into humility. At any rate, he will certainly feel within himself so much chagrin and so much increased respect for you that he will be sufficiently punished.

LXXIII

Almost all women, and also many men—and the prouder they are the more surely—are captivated and kept in subjection by indifference and disdain—or sometimes by merely feigned manifestations of those feelings. For the same pride which induces many men to adopt a haughty carriage towards their inferiors, and towards all who are obsequious to them, makes them strive anxiously to gain the esteem and regard of those who slight them, or who take no notice of them. Whence frequently arises, and not only in love, a perpetual alternation between two persons of changed feelings towards each other—to-day cared for and not caring, to-morrow caring and not cared for. Indeed, it may be said that the like game and alternation appears in some mode more or less in all human society, and that the world is full of people who being seen see not, who being saluted do not respond, and being run after turn aside ; but who, when the process is reversed, and they themselves are treated in the same way, at once change their conduct and court those whom they had before disdained.

LXXIV

To great men, and especially to such as glow with extraordinary virility, the world is as a woman. It not only admires but loves them, being fascinated by their force of character. Often, as with women, the world's love for such is the greater in proportion to the contempt they show for it, the bad treatment they give it, and even the very fear with which they inspire it. Thus Napoleon was intensely loved by France, and was idolised by the soldiers, whom he called food for cannon, and treated as such*. And many other commanders who judged and used men in the same way were in life most dear to their armies, and even now the relation of their deeds inspires readers with love for them. Their very brutality and extravagance charms not a little in such men as it charms women in their lovers. Therefore Achilles always inspires love, whereas the goodness of Æneas and Godfrey and the prudence of these and Ulysses inspire almost hatred.

LXXV

* In several other ways woman is as an image of the world in general, for weakness is the characteristic of the greater number of men, and this renders the multitude in relation to the few who are strong either in mind or heart or hand such as women usually are in relation to them. Therefore women and mankind in general are won by almost the same arts: by boldness mixed with suavity, by bearing repulses, by persevering steadfastly and unashamed, one succeeds at last not only with women, but with the rich, the powerful, men individually, nations, and the ages. As with women it is necessary to strike down one's rivals and make a solitude around one's self, so in the world it is necessary to fell one's competitors and companions and

* Compare *Le Médecin de Campagne* of Balzac; the old soldier Goguelat's wonderful recital of the career of Napoleon; * *Ma foi, la France s'était donnée à lui, comme une belle fille à un lancier.*—Translator.

make one's way over their bodies. These victories over rivals and competitors are gained by the same means, of which the most effective are calumny and ridicule. It is useless and unprofitable to love women or mankind with a love ardent and sincere, or to prefer their interests to one's own. The world, like women, gives itself to those who seduce it, enjoy it, and trample upon it.

LXXVI

Nothing is rarer in the world than a person who is at all times endurable to us.

LXXVII

How to preserve the bodily health is one of the last things which most people think of, its consideration being almost always postponed in favour of some other act or affair in which we may be interested. This may be owing partly, but not altogether, to the fact that life belongs chiefly to the healthy, who, as always happens, either disdain what they possess or do not believe that they can lose it. To take one example among a thousand: when a place is selected for the foundation of a city, and a city, perhaps, which is likely to become very populous, among the reasons which lead to the selection of its site the question of its salubrity or insalubrity will never ~~once~~ be thought of. On the contrary, there is not upon earth a site so unhealthy and so uninviting that men will not willingly settle upon it if other considerations are in its favour. Often a city crowded and unwholesome is found situated very near to another which, in spite of its healthiness, is almost uninhabited. We continually see populations abandoning healthy cities and climates to flock into others where the skies are black and the conditions not only unhealthy but sometimes almost pestilential, provided they find in these other inducements. London and Madrid are cities of the worst sanitary conditions, and yet because they are capitals their population increases daily, owing to the influx of

people who leave their own healthy homes in the provinces. And without going beyond our own country, Leghorn, in Tuscany, because of its commerce, from the time of its foundation has constantly increased and still continues to increase in population, while its close neighbour, Pisa, a most salubrious place, and famous for its sweet and temperate air, which was formerly in the time of its power and prosperity densely populated, is now almost a desert, and its inhabitants grow less numerous every day.

LXXVIII

If two or more persons in a public or private gathering are seen talking and laughing together with more than usual animation, the other persons present being ignorant of the subject of their conversation, a certain degree of fear seems to fall upon the company in general: their discourse becomes serious, some become mute, others go away, and only the bolder spirits join the group of laughers and ask to be allowed to participate in their merriment. It is as if discharges of artillery were heard from guns in ambush close at hand, causing everybody to disperse in confusion, not knowing where the shots might strike, supposing the gunners were not merely practising with blank cartridges.

Laughter appears to procure esteem and respect even from strangers, draws attention from those around us, and seems to give us a sort of superiority over them. And if, as sometimes happens, you find yourself in a gathering where you are disregarded, or cold-shouldered, or treated haughtily or discourteously, all that you need do is to choose among those present one who seems likely to suit your purpose, and then laugh with him freely, loudly, and persistently, taking care to make your laughter seem genuine and unforced as far as possible. Should it appear that any of those present are inclined to laugh at you, let your laugh be louder and longer than theirs. You must be very unlucky if, when they see you laughing thus, the

proudest and most petulant of the company, and those who most laughed at you, do not very soon either retire from the contest, or come up and endeavour to make peace with you, courting your conversation and offering you their friendship. Great among men and, most formidable is the power of laughter, against which no man in his own consciousness feels himself invulnerable. He who has the courage to laugh is lord of the world, much the same as he who is prepared to die.

LXXIX

A youth never acquires the art of living, nor is successful in society, or experiences any pleasure in it until he learns to moderate the vehemence of his desires. The cooler he grows, the abler he becomes to govern himself and to deal with other men. Nature, with her usual benevolence, has ordained that men shall not learn to live until they lose the motives for living; that they shall not know how to realise their desires until they have ceased to account them as heavenly felicities, and when their attainment can only give them a slight degree of pleasure; that they shall not enjoy until they have become incapable of enjoyment. Many find themselves while still young in years in the condition of which I speak, and they often succeed well because of the moderation of their desires; the wisdom of maturity is anticipated in them by their coolness of judgment and their readiness to profit by experience. Others, however long they may live, never learn this art of living. These are the few in whom the strength of the passions and desires is so inherently great that it cannot be exhausted even in a lifetime; and it is these who would enjoy life if nature had destined life for enjoyment. But they are most unhappy, and they remain infants until death in the knowledge of the world, which it is impossible for them to acquire.

LXXX

Seeing again after some years a person I have known young, always at first I seem to see one who has suffered some great calamity. The air of joy and confidence belongs only to youth, and the feeling of what is being lost, and of the bodily ills which increase day by day, gradually produces in the most frivolous or the most cheerful by nature, and even in the most happy, an expression of countenance and a bearing which are termed grave, and which is veritably sad in comparison with the aspect of children and youths.

LXXXI

It is much the same with talkers as with writers. Many of the latter at first strike us as being original in thought and individual in manner, and we are consequently much pleased with them; but as we go on reading they become tiresome, because we discover that they repeat and imitate themselves. So in conversation newcomers are often admired and welcomed because of the freshness of their matter and of their manner; but it is not long before these too become tiresome and sink in our esteem, for all men necessarily, some more and some less, when they do not imitate others, imitate themselves. Therefore those who travel, especially if they are men of good parts and with some skill in the art of conversation, are apt to leave in the places they visit a reputation much above that which they really deserve, because the shortness of their stay gives no opportunity to their hearers to discover in them that poverty of ideas which is the commonest of mental defects. Since their utterances on one or on a few occasions are likely to be confined to matters with which they are well acquainted, or which relate to themselves, they being led to speak upon these topics by the courtesy or the curiosity of their interlocutors, what they say is taken as being a small part only of their intellectual wealth—mere pocket money, so to say—not as it is,

likely enough, either a great part of their riches or the whole of it. And this good opinion of him remains unshaken because no new occasions arise which might destroy it. In the same way travellers themselves are subject to error, often judging too favourably of the persons of merely ordinary ability whom they may happen to meet.

LXXXII

No one becomes a man before he has made a great trial of himself, which, revealing to him what he is and fixing his opinion as to himself, determines in a great degree his fortune and his state in life. For this great experiment, before which no one is much more than a child, the ancient life presented full scope and facilities (*materia infinita e pronta*); but in our day the life of private persons is so poor in chances, and generally of such a nature that, through lack of opportunities, most men die without having made the trial I speak of, and therefore little less infantile than they were born. To others the knowledge and mastery of self usually come either from their needs and misfortunes, or from a great—that is, strong—passion, most often from love, when love is a great passion, which is not always the case. After having had experience of a great and passionate love—it may be either in early life, as with some, or later, and after a number of unimportant love affairs, as seems to be most frequently the case—a man begins to have some knowledge of his fellows, among whom he now moves filled with intense desires, and with newly awakened needs; he now knows his own nature and constitution, knows the measure of his own faculties and energies, and is able henceforth to judge how far he can hope in or despair of himself, and, in so far as the future may be foretold, what position he is likely to attain in the world. In short, life to his eyes takes on a new aspect; it is no longer a thing known merely by hearsay, but by experience; no longer an imagination, but a reality; and he now

feels himself, not happier perhaps, but, so to speak, more potent than before, that is to say, more fit to make use of himself and of others.

LXXXIII

If the few men of real worth who seek glory could know one by one all the persons composing that public by which, with so much toil and suffering, they exert themselves to be honoured, it is likely they would cool very much in their intent and perhaps abandon it. But it is difficult for the mind to release itself from the influence which mere number exercises over it; and so it is that we value and respect the opinion, I will not say of a multitude, but even of ten persons gathered in a room, each one of whom we know to be, considered by himself, a person of no account.

LXXXIV

Jesus Christ was the first who distinctly impeached before men that praiser and teacher of all the false virtues, that detractor and persecutor of all the true; that adversary of every truly great quality in man: that derider of every lofty sentiment, if sincerely held, and of every sweet affection if it be really heartfelt; that slave of the strong, tyrant of the weak, hater of the unhappy; that personification of evil, I mean, which Christ called THE WORLD, a name which it has retained in all civilised languages up to the present time. I do not believe that this comprehensive term, which is so expressive as applied to the present condition of mankind, and which is never likely to fall out of use, had ever before been used by any religious teacher. Nor do I think that the idea is to be found in any of the works of the pagan philosophers. Perhaps before the time of Christ villainy and fraud had not yet arrived at their crowning-point, and civilisation was still at some distance from that stage wherein it becomes almost a synonym for corruption.

Such, in brief, is civilised man: I mean he is such as

he was described by Jesus Christ, and as I have above delineated him. It is true that reason and imagination do not discover him, that books and teachers do not make him known to us, and that nature repudiates him as fabulous: experience of life alone compels us to accept him as real. And it is to be noted that this idea of mankind in general realises itself in every detail in countless individuals.

LXXXV

In the pagan writers that association of persons, which we term society or the world, is never indicted as the enemy of virtue, nor as the sure corrupter of natural goodness and of every bright intellect. But in the Gospels and in many modern writers we find the world continually impeached as the enemy of all true goodness, an idea quite alien to the thoughts of the ancients. Nor will this astonish anyone who will take into consideration a very obvious fact which may serve as a criterion to all who wish to compare the ideas of the ancients and the moderns in matters of morality; and this is, that whereas modern educators fear the influence of society on the young, the ancient sought it; and whereas the moderns seek to withdraw the youth of our days from the evil influences of the world by bringing them up in retirement and seclusion, the ancients compelled, even by force, their youth to enter the world, and freely exposed them to all its influences, believing that they were more likely to improve than to corrupt them.

LXXXVI

The most certain way to hide from others the limits of our knowledge is not to overpass them.

LXXXVII

Those who are great travellers have this advantage over others: that the things they have seen soon take on an aspect of remoteness, and so quickly

acquire that colouring of poetic vagueness and romance, which in others is only brought about by time. Those who have not travelled have this disadvantage : that all their recollections are, as it were, present to them, since the places are present to which the recollections refer.

LXXXVIII

It often happens that men who are vain and full of self-conceit, instead of being egotistical and hard-hearted, as one would expect, are gracious, benevolent, good companions, and even good friends and very obliging. As they think themselves admired of all, they naturally love their supposed admirers, and help them when they can ; and besides, they judge this suitable to the superiority with which they account themselves favoured by destiny. They are fond of society, because they believe that all whom they meet are full of admiration of them ; and they are gentle in their manners, praising themselves inwardly for their condescension, and for knowing how to adapt their greatness to familiarity with the little. And I have remarked that growing in their own conceit, they grow likewise in benignity. Lastly, the certitude they have of their own importance, and of the unanimity of mankind in confessing it, takes from their manners all harshness, because no one who is content with himself and mankind is of harsh behaviour ; and it creates in them such tranquillity of temper that sometimes it actually makes them appear like modest persons.

LXXXIX

He who converses little with men is rarely a misanthrope. Real misanthropes are not found in solitude, but in the world ; since it is experience of life, and not at all philosophy, which produces hatred of mankind. A misanthrope who retires from the world loses his misanthropy in solitude.

XC

I once knew a child who, whenever his mother checked him in anything, used to say, 'Ah, I know what's the matter : mamma is naughty.' Most men speak of their neighbours with the same kind of logic, although they do not express themselves with so much simplicity.

XCI

When you are introduced to anyone, let your introducer, if he really desires to serve you, make no mention of your best and most peculiar merits, but rather expatiate on those which are extrinsic and accidental. If you are great and powerful in the world, let him say so ; if rich, let him not forget that ; if of noble blood, that also should be made the most of ; but do not let him speak of your magnanimity, your virtues, or of your politeness and amiability, save perhaps slightly and by way of addition to your other qualities. And if you are a man of letters, and have gained some celebrity as such, let him not praise you as being learned, profound, or of great talent, but let him say celebrated ; for, as I have said elsewhere, fortune is fortunate in the world, and not worth.

XCII

Jean Jacques Rousseau said that true courtesy of manners consists in showing one's self habitually benevolent. This courtesy will perhaps preserve you from hatred, but it will not procure love for you, except from the very few in whom the benevolence of others excites a corresponding feeling. If you wish by your manners to gain the goodwill of men, and make them your friends, you must appear to esteem them. As disdain displeases and offends more than hatred, so esteem is more grateful than benevolence ; and men generally desire much more to be esteemed than to be loved. Demonstrations of esteem, whether true or

false (for in either case they have the same effect), almost always win gratitude, and many men who would not lift a finger to serve one who really loves them, would throw themselves into the fire for one who pretends to have a great regard for them. Nothing is more effective in reconciling those whom we have offended than such demonstrations; for nature, it seems, will not allow us to hate a person who expresses his esteem for us. Whereas it is not only possible, but very often the case that men hate and avoid those who love them, and even their benefactors. For if the art of pleasing in conversation consists in making men leave our company with a better opinion of themselves than they had when they came to us, it is clear that demonstrations of esteem will be much more effectual in winning men than demonstrations of benevolence. And the less the esteem you bestow is deserved, so much the more will it be valued. Those who are thus habitually courteous are always eagerly run after, wherever they are found; men hastening emulously, as flies swarm to honey, to taste the pleasure of believing themselves esteemed. And usually such persons are themselves much bepraised, because in return for the praises which they bestow upon others, everyone is eager to praise them; some out of gratitude, and some because it is to their interest that those who esteem them shall be themselves praised and esteemed. In this manner men, without intending it, and even perhaps against their wills, by their unanimity in praising such persons, exalt them in society much above themselves, notwithstanding the professions of inferiority which their eulogists are always making.

XCIII

Almost all those who are, by themselves and their friends, thought to be highly valued by the world, are in reality esteemed only by a small circle, or a particular class, or by persons of the same profession or quality as themselves, and among whom they live.

The man of letters who believes himself famous and admired by all the world, finds himself unnoticed or ridiculed whenever he chances to get into a company of frivolous persons, such as three-fourths of society consists of. The young gallant, highly favoured by women and by those of his own quality, is neglected and overlooked in the society of men of business. The courtier, used to the fulsome flattery of his companions and dependants, will be pointed at with derision and avoided by persons of independent spirit. I conclude, then, to speak plainly, that a man cannot hope, and hence should not endeavour, to obtain the esteem, as it is called, of society at large, but only of a small number of persons : as to the others, he should resign himself to be sometimes ignored altogether, and sometimes more or less despised, since nothing better can be expected.

XCIV

The man who has always lived in little places where small ambitions and vulgar avarice prevail, together with violent enmities between their inhabitants, will not only be disposed to believe that great vices do not exist, but will be led to think that sincere and solid social virtues are also non-existent. And in particular he will believe of friendship that it is a thing pertaining to poems and histories, and not to real life. And herein he would be wrong. Good and sincere friends—I do not speak of such as Pylades and Pirithous—are actually to be found in the world, and are by no means rare. The services which may be looked for and asked from such friends as the world now produces are advice, which often proves most useful, and sometimes even deeds, but rarely money or other substantial assistance ; and a wise and prudent man will not ask for such. It is easier to find one who will risk his life for a stranger, than one who for the sake of a friend will, I don't say spend, but risk a crown. *

XCV

Nor are men in this without excuse, for it is not often that anyone has more than he needs ; the needs depending usually on a man's position in life, so that his expenditure is for the most part proportioned to his wealth, and not seldom exceeds it. As for those few who hoard without spending, they have the need of hoarding, either to carry out some project or to provide for future contingencies. To say that this or that necessity is imaginary is not to the purpose, since there are few things indeed in life the value of which, either wholly or in great part, does not depend upon the imagination.

XCVI

A sensible man, as he grows in age and experience, easily becomes indifferent to praise or honours, but never, I believe, to blame or contempt. Indeed, the praise and esteem of many distinguished men will not compensate him for the pain which a word or sign of disapproval from some quite insignificant person will give him. Perhaps the reverse is the case with rogues, who, being used to blame, and not accustomed to praise, may care nothing for the former, but may keenly enjoy the latter if it is ever bestowed upon them.

XCVII

It seems a paradox, but experience of life will prove it to be most true, that those whom the French term originals are not only not rare, but in reality are so common that I would almost say that it is most rare to find a man in society who really is not, as it is said, an original. I do not speak of slight differences between one man and another. I speak of qualities and manners which are natural to one man, but to others will seem strange, bizarre, and absurd : and I say, moreover, that it will seldom happen to you to associate long with any person, however conventional

he may at first appear, without discovering in him more than one oddity, absurdity, or singularity such as will fairly astonish you. You will make this discovery sooner with people of other nationalities than with the French : sooner, perhaps, with mature or old men than with the young, who often make it their ambition not to differ in their manners from those around them, and who are more accustomed, if well educated, to put a curb upon their natural dispositions. But sooner or later you will make this discovery in the greater part of those persons with whom you are brought into relation. So infinitely various is nature, and so impossible is it for civilisation, which aims to produce uniformity of character among mankind, to triumph over it.

XCVIII

Here is a somewhat similar observation : Everyone who has had a large experience of mankind will, on reflecting a little, remember that he has been, not many, but very many times, a spectator of and perhaps actor in events not different from those which, seen in theatres or read of in plays or novels, seem altogether due to the imagination of their authors, and to have no relation to nature or real life. This only shows that the wickedness, the follies and the vices, the ridiculous qualities and actions of men are much greater than we supposed them to be, and that they, much more frequently than we had thought, exceed the limits which we call ordinary, and indeed often surpass the wildest inventions of the romancist.

XCIX

People are never ridiculous except when they try to appear or to be that which they are not. The poor, the ignorant, the rustic, the sick, the old, are never ridiculous while they are content to appear such as they are, without endeavouring to masquerade as something else ; but when the old try to appear

young, the sick healthy, the poor rich, the ignorant learned, the rustic courtly, they are truly ridiculous. Even bodily deformities, however grave, would only excite a passing smile if the person subject to them did not attempt to conceal them—that is, to appear as if he had them not, or, in other words, try to produce a false impression. In short, a little consideration will show that our defects and our disadvantages are never ridiculous in themselves; it is only when we make vain and futile efforts to conceal them, or to appear as if we had them not, that they become subjects for laughter.

Those also act foolishly who, in order to ingratiate themselves with others, attempt to appear more amiable than they really are. It soon becomes difficult, if not impossible, to maintain the assumed character; and the contradiction between the real and the pretended self, which must needs become evident from time to time, renders the person much more unamiable and unpleasing than he would be if he showed frankly and constantly his true nature. For in every character, even the most unamiable, there is some redeeming quality, which, making itself evident, will please far more than any simulated virtues.

Speaking generally, the endeavour to be or appear that which we are not spoils everything we attempt; and it is this alone which renders insupportable many persons who would be very endurable if they would only be content to be what they really are. This is so not only with individuals, but societies, and even entire populations. I know several provincial cities, cultivated and flourishing, which would be pleasant enough places to live in but for their maladroit imitation of the capitals—that is to say, their desire to be as far as they can not provincial, but capital cities.

C

• Returning to the consideration of the defects and disadvantages which men may have to endure, I will not deny that the world often resembles those judges

who are forbidden by law to pass a capital sentence upon a convicted criminal until he has made an explicit confession of his guilt. And rightly ; for though it is ridiculous to try to hide those defects of mind and person which are plainly obvious, it does not follow that one should spontaneously acknowledge them, and still less that one should, on account of them, admit one's inferiority to other people. That would be simply condemning one's self with that final verdict which the world, while one looks it fearlessly in the face, will never pronounce. In the kind of struggle of each against all and of all against each, in which, if we call things by their right names, social life consists, everyone seeking to pull down his fellow that he may stand upon him, he makes a great mistake who prostrates himself or stoops, or even bows his head spontaneously ; for, except when those actions are performed as feints or stratagems, his neighbours will beyond all doubt at once mount upon his back, or fall upon him, without any sort of courtesy or compassion. The young nearly always commit this error, and the nobler their nature the more readily : I mean the error of confessing without necessity and inopportunately their infirmities and misfortunes, partly because of the frankness which is natural to their age, which makes them detest dissimulation and find satisfaction in avowing the truth, even against themselves, and partly because, being generous themselves, they believe that they will thus win pardon from the world for their faults and misfortunes. That golden age of life is so far from understanding the real nature of the world that young men are often led to make a display of their unhappiness, thinking that this will make them interesting to others and gain them friends. And, to tell the truth, it is reasonable enough that they should think thus ; for it requires a long and continual personal experience to convince noble spirits that the world pardons all things else more readily than misfortune, and that it is the happy and not the unhappy whom fortune favours ; and, therefore, if they wish to gain the world's goodwill, their best

course is to make a pretence of being happy, even if they are not so. To confess one's unhappiness does not awaken pity but pleasure in others ; does not sadden but rejoice, not only enemies, but all who hear it, because it is, as it were, an attestation of their own good fortune, and of the inferiority of the one who complains. Therefore a man, having nothing on earth to confide in except his own energies, should never yield anything, nor draw back a step voluntarily, much less surrender at discretion, but persist in defending himself to the last, and struggle obstinately to retain or acquire, if possible, even in despite of fate, what he will never get by appealing to the generosity or the humanity of his neighbours. For my part, I think that no one should allow himself to be called in his presence unhappy or unfortunate ; since those terms in almost all languages were and are synonyms for a dishonest person, perhaps through the ancient superstition, according to which the unhappy were full of trickeries. Certainly those expressions are, and always will be, in all languages insulting, from the fact that he who pronounces them, whatever his intention, thereby exalts himself and abases his companion ; and so it is felt by any hearer.

CI

Confessing his own ills, although manifest, a man often lessens the esteem and hence the affection of those most dear to him : so necessary is it that each one should sustain himself by his own strength ; and in spite of every misfortune display a firm and secure self-esteem, thus giving an example to others, and, as it were, constraining them also to esteem him. For if the estimation of a man does not begin with himself, it will hardly begin elsewhere ; and if it is not firmly founded in himself, it is certain that it will not take root in others. Human society resembles fluid, each molecule or globule of which presses strongly its neighbours beneath and above and on all sides, and through these the more remote, and is itself pressed

in the same manner. If at any point the resistance and the pressure, from any chance, diminish, the mass of the fluid at once rushes thither, and the vacancy is occupied by new globules.

CII

The years of childhood are in the memory of each one the fabulous time of his existence; as in the memory of nations the fabulous ages are those of their childhood.

CIII

If we happen to be praised on account of qualities which we formerly despised, our estimation of those qualities rises immediately.

CIV

The education received, especially in Italy, by those who are educated (who, to speak the truth, are not many) is a formal conspiracy organised by weakness against strength, by old age against youth. The old say to the young, "Renounce the pleasures proper to your age, because they are dangerous and opposed to good morals, and because we, who have enjoyed them as much as we could, and would fain continue to enjoy them were it in our power, can no longer do so in consequence of our age. Do not seek to live happily in the present, but be obedient and long-suffering, and work without cessation in order that you may learn to live when time to live is no longer left to you. Wisdom and honour demand that you shall abstain as much as possible from making use of your youth, except for the purpose of surpassing others in toil and study. Leave the direction of your destiny and of all that concerns you in our hands: we will rule everything in your interest. It is true that we did exactly the contrary of this at your age, and that we should do so once more if we could be rejuvenated; but you should pay attention to our words, and not to our past actions

or future intentions. So doing, believe in us who have knowledge and experience of human affairs, and you will be happy." But, for my part, I do not know in what deceit and fraud consist, if not in promising happiness to the young and inexperienced under such conditions.

The interests of order and tranquillity, public and private, are opposed to the pleasures and enterprises of the young; and therefore even good education, or what passes for such, consists in a great degree of deceiving the pupils in order to make them sacrifice their own desires and inclinations for the comfort of their elders. But apart from this, the old naturally seek to destroy and to eliminate from human life the spirit of youth, which, having lost themselves, they abhor to see in others. In all times age has conspired against youth, since in all times the baseness of condemning and persecuting others because they possessed advantages denied to their persecutors, has been natural to men. It is nevertheless surprising that among educators, who of all men profess most to have the interests of their pupils at heart, there are so many to be found who seek to deprive them of life's greatest treasure, namely, that of youth. It is even more surprising that no father or mother, or any other teacher, ever feels any remorse of conscience for giving children an education based on such an evil principle. This would be incredible if the endeavour to abolish youth had not, for other causes, been considered, for a long time past, as a meritorious action.

The fruit of such cultivation, maleficent in itself, because intended to benefit the cultivator by ruining the plant, is that the pupils, having lived like old men in their flourishing prime, render themselves ridiculous in their age by seeking to live as if young; or, as more often happens, that nature conquers, and the young, living as young in despite of their education, become rebels against their tutors; and, resenting their attempts to restrain them from the enjoyments proper to their years, pay henceforth no regard to their advice; whereas, if the parents or guardians had

ruled their charges in accordance with nature, they would have been able, owing to their children's or pupils' confidence in them, to exercise over them a good and salutary influence.

CV

Cunning, which is itself a lower form of intellect, is often used to supply the want of intellect, or to vanquish the superior intellectual powers of others.

CVI

The world laughs at the things which it ought to admire, and like Æsop's fox, pretends to blame that which it envies or desires. A great and ardent love-passion, with its mingled pains and pleasures, is universally envied, and therefore censured and condemned. A generous nature, an heroic deed, are worthy of admiration; but men, because they would feel themselves humiliated if they admired them, especially in their equals, prefer to laugh at them. So far is this carried that in common life it is more necessary to conceal a noble action than a base one, because baseness is common to all, and is therefore at least pardoned; while nobleness, being unusual, is thought to indicate presumption, or a desire for applause which the world does not love to bestow, and seldom bestows sincerely.

CVII

Many foolish things are said in society merely because the speakers want to say something. But a youth who has some self-respect often errs, when he first enters the world, in another manner: that is, he refrains from speaking until he has something extraordinary in beauty or importance to say; and as such an occasion seldom occurs, it often happens that he remains silent. The most sensible and animated conversation is usually composed of frivolous or commonplace observations, which serve the purpose at least of passing the time in talk. And everyone must make

up his mind to say many commonplace things, for it is only now and then that one is able to utter a striking or memorable saying.

CVIII

Men study while still immature to appear mature, and yet when they have reached maturity their desire is to appear immature. Oliver Goldsmith, the author of *The Vicar of Wakefield*, when he arrived at the age of forty, removed from his address the title of Doctor, such an indication of gravity, which had been dear to him in his early years, having then become distasteful to him.

CIX

Man is almost always as wicked as his needs require. If he acts uprightly it may be judged that wickedness is not necessary to him. I have seen persons of the most gentle and innocent nature commit the most atrocious actions in order to escape some serious injury, not avoidable otherwise.

CX

It is curious to remark that nearly all men of sterling worth are simple in their manners; and yet nearly always simple manners are taken as a sign of little worth.

CXI

A habit of keeping silence amidst a company of talkers pleases, and is praised when it is known that the silent one can speak well and to the purpose whenever speech is required.

PLYMOUTH
WILLIAM BRENDON AND SON, LTD.
PRINTERS

